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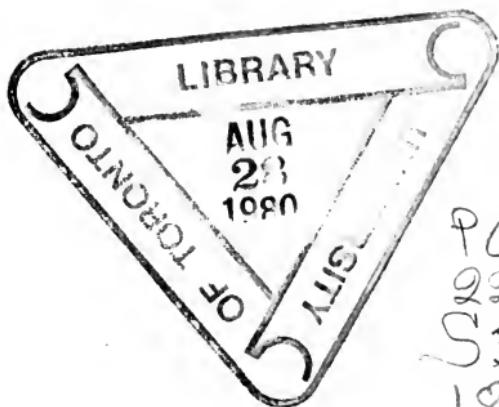


Translated by

Henry Frith

London
J. M. Dent and Co.
1896





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2216
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1896

Printed by BALLANTYNE, HANSON & Co.
At the Ballantyne Press



I



“LOOK at me!—so! I like the colour
of your eyes! What is your name?”

“Jean!”

“Only Jean?”

“Jean Gaussin.”

“From the South, I perceive. How old
are you?”

“Twenty-one.”

“Artist?”

“No, madame.”

“Ah, so much the better.”

These scraps of sentences, almost unintelligible amid the exclamations, the laughter, and the dance-music of a fancy ball, were exchanged—one night in June—between a *pifferaro* and a Fellah woman, in the conservatory, filled with palms and tree ferns, which formed the background of Déchelette’s studio.

To the pressing questions of the Egyptian woman the *pifferaro* replied with the ingenuousness of youth, and with the freshness and vivacity of a Southerner who has been long silent. A stranger in that crowd of painters and sculptors, lost since his entrance to the ball-room by the friend who had brought him thither, he had been wandering listlessly around for two hours, displaying his handsome fair face browned by the sun, his hair in curls as close and short as his sheep-skin costume, while a murmur of admiration, of which he scarcely seemed conscious, arose around him as he proceeded.

He was bumped by the dancers, ridiculed on account of the bagpipe which he

was carrying so awry, and for his mountain costume, so heavy and uncomfortable on a summer night. A Japanese lady, with eyes of the faubourg, hummed teasingly, "Ah, how handsome he is, how handsome is this postillion ;" while a Spanish novice attired in white silk lace, thrust her bouquet of white jasmine beneath his nose, as she was passing by on the arm of an Apache Chief.

He did not understand these advances ; feeling extremely ridiculous he took shelter in the cool shade of a glazed gallery, bordered by a wide divan beneath the greenery. He was immediately joined by this woman, who came and sat down close to him.

Young ? Pretty ? He could not have told you. From the long blue woollen costume which fell over her rounded form, two well-formed rounded arms extended, bare to the shoulder ; her small hands were laden with rings ; her large grey eyes wide open, and gaining greater prominence by reason of the fantastic iron ornaments which hung upon her forehead, completed the harmonious whole.

An actress no doubt. Many of the

profession came to Déchelette's house : and this reflection was not calculated to put him at his ease, for he had rather a fear of that class. She began to talk to him very

familiarly, her elbow on her knee, her head supported by her hand, with a sad sweetness, a little sense of languor. "From the South, really ? And with such fair hair too ! What an extraordinary thing !"

Then she wanted to know how long he had been in Paris, if the examination for the consular service for which he was preparing was

very difficult : whether he knew many people, and how it had come to pass that he found himself at Déchelette's party in the Rue de Rome So far from the Latin Quarter too !



When he told her the name of the student who had brought him, "La Gournerie, a relative of the author—she knew him no doubt"—the expression of the woman's face changed, grew suddenly clouded: but he paid no attention to that, being at the time of life when the eyes sparkle without seeing anything. La Gournerie had assured him that his cousin would be there, and that he would introduce him. "I am so fond of his poetry; I should be so glad to know him!"

She had a smile of pity, and a pretty shrug of the shoulders, for his ingenuousness, even while she held back the bamboos and looked amid the dancers, to see whether she could not find out the great man for him.

The dance was just then in full swing, it was like a fairy scene. The studio, or rather the hall, for scarcely ever was any work done in it, was raised to the full height of the mansion, and made one immense apartment of it. From the light gauzy hangings, the blinds of fine straw or gauze, the lacquered screens, the various coloured glass, the clusters of yellow roses which decked the high Renaissance fire-place, the varied and fantastic light of innumerable Chinese, Persian, Moorish, and Japanese lanterns was reflected. Some of these in iron

open-work, with ogive apertures like the door of a mosque ; some in paper resembling fruits, others displayed fan-wise cut into the shapes of flowers, ibis, and serpents. With startling suddenness great jets of electric light at times would pale the thousands of lanterns and blanch in their moonlike rays faces and bare shoulders, all the phantasmagoria of dresses, plumes, spangles, ribbons which were mingling in the ball, or seated on the Dutch staircase with wide balustrade which led to the first-floor corridors, above the necks of the double-basses, and the frantic time-beating of the conductor's baton.

From his place the young man could see all this through a lattice-work of green, and through creeping plants, which while mingling with the decorations framed them, and by an optical illusion cast here and there in the dance, garlands of wisteria upon the trailing white robe of a princess or crowned a Pompadour shepherdess with a dracæna leaf : and besides for the young man the interest of the spectacle was doubled by learning from his Egyptian acquaintance the names, all illustrious and well-known, which were concealed beneath costumes of such varied and whimsical character.

Yonder whipper-in carrying his whip slung over his shoulder was Jadin; while a little farther on that shabby cassock concealed the identity of the elderly Isabey, taller by a pack of cards in his buckled shoes. Père Corot smiled beneath the great pack of a Pensioner's cap. She also pointed out Thomas Couture as a bull-dog, Jundt as a convict-warden, and Cham as a bird of the West India islands.

There were some serious and historic costumes: a plumed Marat, a Prince Eugene, a Charles the First, worn by very young painters which indicated plainly the difference between the two generations of artists; the last arrivals serious, cold, with heads as one sees on the Bourse, aged by those peculiar wrinkles which indicate money-cares; the others very *gamins*, boisterous, overflowing with high spirits.

Notwithstanding his fifty-five years and the



A.G.

palms of the Institute, the sculptor Caoudal as a hussar, his arms naked, showing his Herculean biceps, a painter's palette dangling about his long legs in lieu of a sabretache, was dancing "*cavalier seul*" of the time of the "*Grande Chaumière*" opposite to a musician named de Potter who, dressed as a muezzin out for a holiday, his turban awry, was imitating the "*stomach dance*," and squalling *Allah il Allah* at the top of his shrill voice.

A large circle of resting dancers surrounded these lively celebrities, and in the first rank was Déchelette, the master of the house, frowning beneath a high Persian headdress, with his small eyes, Kalmuk nose, and grizzled beard, happy in the enjoyment of others, although he gave no evidence of it.

Déchelette, the engineer, a personage in the artist-society of Paris some ten or twelve years ago, a very good fellow, very rich, with a taste for art and that free-and-easy manner, the contempt for public opinion which travel and celibacy bestow, had then the superintendence of a railway between Tauris and Teheran: and every year, by way of refreshing himself after ten months of toil, of nights under canvas, of feverish

gallops over sands and swamps, he came to spend the hot season in this mansion in the Rue de Rome, built after his own plan, furnished like a summer palace, where he assembled witty men and pretty women, only asking civilisation to give him for a few weeks the essence of anything appetising and exhilarating that it could bestow.

"Déchelette has arrived." That was the news in the studio as soon as the great canvas blind which shaded the glazed façade of the mansion was raised by his domestics. That meant that the fun was about to begin, and that for two months festivity and music, dancing and amusement would continue to intrude upon the dead silence of the Quartier de l'Europe at that season of country-visiting and sea-bathing.

Personally Déchelette counted for nothing in the bacchanalian feasts which were uproarious in his house night and day. That unwearied libertine regarded his pleasure with a coldness, a vague regard, smiling as if under the influence of *hasisch*, but with coolness and imperturbable calmness. A faithful friend, and open-handed, he nevertheless had for women all the contempt of an Eastern-born, with indulgence and politeness,

and of those who came to his house, attracted by his wealth or by the joyous life led there not one could boast of having been his mistress for more than one day.

"A good fellow all the same," added the Egyptian woman, who had given Gaussin all these details. Then, suddenly interrupting herself, she exclaimed—

"There is your poet!"

"Where?"

"Before you—dressed as a village bridegroom."

The young man ejaculated an Oh! of disappointment. His poet! That fat, shiny, perspiring man, exhibiting a clumsy grace in the shirt collar and the flowered waistcoat proper to Jeannot! The grand, despairing cries of the Book of Love came to Gaussin's mind, from that volume which he could never read without some feverish throbings: and he mechanically murmured aloud—

"To animate the proud marble of thy body,
O Sappho, I have given all my heart's blood!"

She turned quickly, her barbaric pendants jangling, and cried—

"What are you muttering there?"



They were some of La Gournerie's verses : he was surprised that she did not know them.

"I don't like verse," she said shortly ; then she stood up, her brows contracted, watching the dancers and nervously fingering the beautiful bunches of lilac-hued flowers which hung in front of her. Then with a decision which cost her an effort, she said, "Good night," and disappeared.

The poor *pifferaro* sat quite motionless. "What is the matter with her? What have I said to her?" He considered, but could find no reason, and thought he would go to bed. He picked up his bagpipe mournfully and re-entered the dancing-room less troubled at the departure of the Egyptian than at the prospect of the crowd he had to thread before he could gain the door.

The sense of his own obscurity amongst so many illustrious people made him more bashful than ever.

Dancing had nearly ceased by this time ; a few couples here and there were clinging to the dying strains of a waltz, and amongst them Caoudal, superb and majestic, was whirling about with his head high in air with a little tricoteuse, whose head gear was streaming in

the wind as he lifted her in his brawny arms.

Through the large casement at the end of the room, now thrown wide open, entered gusts of the pallor-giving morning air, moving the palm-leaves, and flaring the candles almost to the point of extinguishing them. A paper lantern caught fire, some sockets were cracked, and all round the room the servants were placing small round tables like these we see at cafés. The guests always supped in this fashion four or five together at Déchelette's; and sympathetic souls were seeking each other, and arranging themselves already.

Cries and shouts resounded. The '*Pil-out*' of the faubourg answered the 'you, you, you, you,' in the rattling accents of the Eastern girls. There were remarks made in low tones, and the voluptuous laughter of women led to their places with a caress.

Gaussin was taking advantage of the confusion to make his way towards the door, when his friend the student, in a great perspiration, his eyes almost starting from his head, a bottle under each arm arrested him. "Where on earth are you going? I have been looking for you everywhere! I have secured a table, and some women are there—little Bachellery

of the *Bouffes*, the Japanese girl, you know. She sent me to find you. Come quickly :" and he darted away.

The *pifferaro* was thirsty, and besides the intoxication of the ball tempted him, as did the appearance of the little actress who was beckoning to him from a distance. But a grave sweet voice murmured close to his ear—

"Do not go over there!"

She, his former acquaintance, was beside him, close to him drawing him away: and he followed her without hesitation. Why? It was not the attractiveness of the woman—he had scarcely looked at her; and the other yonder who was beckoning to him, arranging the steel knives in her hair, was much more to his taste. But he was obeying a will stronger than his own, the impetuous violence of a desire.

"Do not go over there!"

Suddenly they found themselves on the pavement of the Rue de Rome. Cabs were waiting in the pale morning light. Street-sweepers and working men going about their business looked at the noisy and crowded party, at the couple in fancy dress, a Shrove Tuesday masquerade in the height of summer.

"To your house or to mine?" she asked.

Without well knowing how to explain it to himself he thought that it would be better to go to his, and gave his distant address to the driver of the cab. During the long ride they spoke but little to each other. Only she continued to hold one of his hands between her own, which he felt were very small, and cold as ice : and had it not been for the chill of her nervous clasp he would have thought she was asleep, as she leant back in the *fiacre* with the shadow of the blue blind upon her face.

They stopped at the Rue Jacob in front of a students' lodging. Four stories to mount ; it was a high and steep climb. "Would you like me to carry you up?" he said laughingly, but in a low tone because of the sleeping inmates. She looked him over slowly, disdainfully, but tenderly ; it was a glance of experience which gauged him and clearly said, "Poor little man!"

Then he, with a strong effort born of his youth and his southern blood, took her up in his arms and carried her like a child, for he was stout and lusty notwithstanding all his feminine fairness of feature ; he ascended the first flight without pausing

for breath, happy in the weight which two fresh, naked, arms clasped around his neck.

The second flight was longer and less agreeable. The woman let herself go, and consequently the weight was greater in proportion. The iron of her pendants, which had at first only tickled him, began to indent his flesh cruelly.

At the third landing he was panting like a piano-carrier : his wind failed him, while she kept murmuring ravishingly, “O my dear, how nice it is, how delicious it is!” and the last few steps which he scaled one by one seemed to him to pertain to a giant stairway, whose walls, banisters, and narrow windows, kept turning round in an interminable spiral. He was no longer carrying a woman but something heavy, horrible, which suffocated him, and which every moment he felt tempted to let go, to throw from him in rage at the risk of a brutal crash.

Arrived at the narrow landing, “So soon,” she said, opening her eyes. He was thinking “At last” but he could not have said so, as he stood there deadly pale, his hands upon his chest which felt bursting.

Their whole history, this ascent of the staircase in the sad grey light of the morning !





II

HE kept her for two days, and then she left him, leaving behind her an impression of soft skin and fine linen. No other information about herself except her name and address and this : "When you wish for me call me, I shall always be ready."

The very small card, elegant and perfumed, bore these words.

FANNY LEGRAND

6, Rue de l'Arcade.

He put it in his chimney-glass between an invitation to the last ball at the Foreign

Office, and the illuminated and quaint programme of Déchelette's party, his only two evening entertainments that year: and the memory of the woman, which remained some days about the mantelpiece in the delicate faint perfume, evaporated in the same time as it, without Gaussin, who had an aim in life, and who was a hard worker, distrusting above all things the allurements of Paris, ever having had the idea of renewing this *amourette* of a night.

The official examination was to take place in November. Only three months remained to him in which to prepare for it. Afterwards would succeed a probation of three or four years in the Consular service; then he would be sent away to some distant land. This prospect of exile did not alarm him, for a tradition amongst the Gaussins of Armandy—an old Avignon family, decided that the eldest son of the house should follow what they called "the career," with the example, the encouragement, and the moral protection of those who had preceded him in it. For this provincial, Paris was only the first step upon a very long journey—a fact which prevented him from forming any close connections in love or in friendship.

A week or two after the ball at Déchelette's, one evening as Gaussin, his lamp alight, his books laid out on the table, was setting to work, a timid knock at the door was heard, and when he opened it a woman appeared dressed in becoming and elegant style. He only recognised her when she put back her "fall."



"You see 'tis I : I have come back !"

Then interpreting the restless, bored glance which he cast upon the work on the table she said—"Oh, I shall not disturb you. . . . I know what it is." Then she took off her bonnet, took up a number of the *Tour du*

Monde, settled herself in a chair, and sat still, seemingly absorbed in her reading ; but each time that he raised his eyes he met her gaze.

And indeed he needed all his strength to resist the impulse to take her then and there in his arms, for she was very tempting and charming, with her small head, low forehead, short nose, her pretty sensual lips, and the lithe maturity of her form displayed in her gown of most Parisian correctness, less alarming to him than the semi-costume of an Egyptian woman.

Though she left him the following morning she returned several times during the week, and always came back with the same pallor, the same cold clammy hands, the same voice broken with emotion.

“ Oh, I know quite well I bore you,” she would say to him—“ I know I fatigue you ; I ought to have more pride. If you will believe it—every morning as I leave your house I swear I will never enter it again : but I come back again in the evening as if I were possessed.”

He looked at her, amused, surprised in his contempt for women by this amorous persistence.

Those he had known hitherto—girls whose acquaintance he had made at drinking

places and skating-rinks, sometimes young and pretty girls—always left him disgusted with their vacant laughter, their housemaids' hands, the grossness of their instincts and remarks which caused him to open the window when they had gone away. In his innocence he had fancied all “fast” women were alike. So he was very much surprised to perceive in Fanny a sweetness, a reserve truly feminine, with this advantage over the countrywomen he had met in the provinces at his mother's house: she possessed a smattering of art—of all things—which rendered her conversation interesting and varied.

Then she was a musician; she could sing, accompanying herself upon the piano, in a contralto voice, somewhat worn and unequal, but well-trained, some romance by Chopin or Schumann, country songs, airs of Berri, Burgundy or Picardy, of which she knew quite a large number.

Gaussin, who was passionately fond of music, that art of idleness and open air, in which his countrymen delight, was moved to ecstacy by the sound in his working hours, or while reposing in delicious rapture. And emanating from Fanny it was particularly

ravishing. He was surprised that she was not on the stage, and thus he learned that she had sung at the *Lyrique*. "But not for long—I found it much too tiresome," she said.

As a matter of fact there was nothing studied about her, nothing stagey: no shadow of vanity or deceit. Only a certain mystery concerning her life out of doors, a mystery even undivulged in moments of passion, and which her lover did not attempt to penetrate, feeling neither curious nor jealous, permitting her to come at the time agreed upon without looking at the clock, ignorant so far of the feelings of expectation—those great throbs of the heart which are struck by desire and impatience.

Occasionally, the summer being very fine that year, they went about together in search of all those charming corners in the environs of Paris of which she knew every detail. They mixed in the noisy crowds of passengers at the suburban stations, breakfasted at some inn on the skirts of a wood or lake, only avoiding the too greatly frequented places. One day when he proposed to her to go to the Vaux de Cernay—she cried, "No, no, not there: there are too many artists there."

He remembered that this antipathy for artists had led to their first acquaintance. When he inquired the reason of it, "They are," she said, "such crazy, crack-brained fellows, who always tell more than ever has happened. They have done me a great deal of injury."

Then he would protest. "Nevertheless, art is beautiful. There is nothing to be compared with it for embellishing—for enlarging the sphere of life."

"Look you, dear, this is beautiful : to be simple and upright like you : to be twenty years old, and to love so well."

Twenty years old ! One would not have said *she* was older, to see her so vivacious, always ready, laughing at anything, finding everything enjoyable.

One evening at Saint-Clair, in the valley of Chevreuse they arrived the day before the fair, and could not find a room. It was late, and to reach the next village they must walk a league through the wood. At length they were offered a shake-down at the end of a barn in which some masons were sleeping.

"Let us go there," she said laughing, "it will recall to me the time when I was miserable."

She had known misery then !

They groped their way between the

occupied beds in the great whitewashed barn, where a night lamp was flaring in a niche in the wall : and all night lying close together, they smothered their kisses and laughter, listening to the snoring of their wearied companions, whose working clothes and hob-nailed shoes lay close by the silk dress and dainty boots of the Parisienne.

At daybreak a panel was opened at the bottom of the great door, a ray of light was admitted upon the sack beds and battered floor, while a hoarse voice called out, "Get up there, you people." Then in the again darkened barn a general movement arose, yawning, stretching, loud coughing, the sad sounds usual to an awakening of human beings : and then heavily and silently the Limousins departed one by one, without even imagining that they had been sleeping so close to such a pretty girl.

Behind them she arose, put on her dress by feeling only, and hastily arranged her hair.

"Stay there, I am coming back," she said. She returned in a moment with an enormous armful of wild flowers drenched with dew. "Now let us go to sleep" she said, as she cast on the bed the fresh and odorous blossoms which revivified the atmosphere around them.

And in his eyes she never had appeared
prettier than when she entered the barn,



laughing, in the early dawn her light hair
flying about her, the wild flowers in her arms.

On another occasion they were breakfasting at Ville d'Avray, by the lake. The mist of the autumnal morning rested on the calm water and the variegated forest in front of them, and alone in the little garden of the restaurant they were embracing each other while eating the *ablettes*. Suddenly from a rustic summer-house in the plane-tree at the base of which their table was placed, a, loud and mocking voice exclaimed, “I say. you two, when you have quite finished billing and cooing there !” And the leonine face and ruddy beard of the sculptor Caoudal peered through a loophole in the hut.

“ I have a great mind to come down and breakfast with you. I am as melancholy as an owl up here.”

Fanny did not reply, being evidently annoyed at the recognition : but he on the contrary accepted at once, being curious concerning this celebrated artist and pleased to have him at table.

Caoudal very effectively got up in *négligée* costume, but every detail of which was studied, from the white tie of china crêpe —to set off a complexion seamed with wrinkles and blotches—to the jacket which

fitted closely to a still slim and muscular figure, Caoudal seemed older than at Déchelette's ball.

But what surprised, and even embarrassed him a little was the tone of intimacy which the sculptor adopted towards his mistress. He called her "Fanny" and "tutoyed" her. "You know," he said, as he set his plate at their table, "that I have been a widower for the last fifteen days. Maria has bolted with Morateur. That made me feel rather quiet for a while. But this morning when I entered my studio I felt fearfully lazy : impossible to work : so I left my group, and came out to breakfast in the country. Ridiculous idea when one is alone : in a little while I should have been weeping into my *gibelotte*."

Then looking at the Provençal, whose soft beard and curly locks were the colour of the Sauterne in the glasses, he said,

"How delicious is youth ! No fear that this one will be let go : and what is better still, it is infectious. She looks almost as youthful as he."

"You wretch !" she exclaimed laughing : her laugh rang out seductively, youthfully : the youth of a woman who loves and wishes to make herself beloved.

"Astonishing, astonishing," muttered Caoudal, who was scrutinising her while he proceeded with his breakfast, a trace of sadness and envy hovering in the corners of his mouth.

'I say, Fanny, do you remember a breakfast here—a long time ago indeed. Ezano—Dejoie and all the set were here—you fell into the pond ! They dressed you up in man's clothes with the keeper's tunic on. It suited you to perfection !'

"I don't remember," she replied coldly, and truthfully, for these fickle casual beings never exist save in their love for the time. They have no recollection of what has preceded it and no fear for the future.

Caoudal, on the contrary, mindful of the past, recounted between his draughts of Sauterne the exploits of his lusty youth : love and drinking, parties in the country opera balls, horse-play in the studios, engagements and conquests. But when he turned towards the pair as the brightness returned to his eyes with the flames he stirred up, he perceived that they were scarcely paying any attention to him, and were engaged in plucking grapes from each other's lips.

"But all this is rather tame. I see I am

boring you. Ah, the deuce ! It is folly to be old." Then he rose and threw aside his table-napkin, "I pay for the breakfast, Langlois," he called out in the direction of the restaurant.



He turned away sadly, trailing his feet as if he were suffering from some mortal disease. For a long while the lovers watched his tall figure as it stooped beneath the golden-tinted foliage.

“Poor Caoudal ! it is true he’s nearly played out,” murmured Fanny in a tone of gentle commiseration, and when Gaussin betrayed his indignation that Maria, a girl, a model, could laugh at the sufferings of a Caoudal and chose in preference—whom ? Morateur, a little painter without any talent, with nothing but his youth to recommend him, she began to laugh : “Ah, you innocent, you innocent,” she said, and pulling his head down upon her knees she began to breathe on him, to mumble him, his eyes, his hair, all over, like a bouquet.

That evening Jean for the first time slept at his mistress’s house : she had been teasing him about this for the last three months.

“But now why do you not wish to?”

“I don’t know—it worries me.”

“When I tell you I am quite free, that I am alone—”

So the fatigue of the excursion assisting her she had seduced him to the Rue de l’Arcade, close to the railway station. On the first floor of a respectable-looking and comfortable house, an old domestic in a peasant’s cap and with a somewhat soured appearance, came to open the door.

“It is Machaume. Good day, Machaume.”

said Fanny, embracing her round the neck.
“You see, here he is, my lover, my king, I have
brought him. Quick, light all the candles,
make the house look lovely.”

Jean was left to himself in a very small



drawing-room, with arched low windows draped with the same commonplace blue silk which covered the few pieces of lacquered furniture. On the walls some landscapes lighted up the drapery, and each one bore a dedication to

Fanny Legrand—to my dear Fanny—and so on.

On the chimney-piece was a half-size copy of Caoudal's "*Sappho*," in marble, the bronze counterpart of which may be met with anywhere, and which Gaussin had, as a child, seen in his father's study. By the gleam of the solitary candle he could perceive the resemblance, albeit refined and youthful, which this work of art bore to his mistress. The turn of the profile, the contour of the figure beneath the drapery, the tapering roundness of the arms clasping the knees, were features all well and intimately known to him: his eyes feasted on them with the recollection of sensations more tender.

Fanny, finding him wrapped in contemplation before the figure, said in a free and easy tone, "That is something like me, is it not? Caoudal's model resembled me." And immediately she carried him off to her bedroom, where Machaume, looking very cross, was laying supper for two on a round table. All the candles were alight, even to those fixed to the glass door of the wardrobe; a fine fire of logs, gay as the first of the season, was blazing behind the guard. It was the bedroom of a woman dressing for a ball.

"I preferred to have supper here," she said laughing; "we shall be in bed all the sooner."

Jean had never beheld a room more coquettishly furnished. The Louis Seize hangings, the clear muslin of his mother's and sister's rooms bore no resemblance to this padded nest, where wood was concealed beneath soft satin: where the bed was only a divan broader than the others, extended at the farther end of the room on white furs.

Delicious was this caress of light, of warmth, of elongated blue reflections from the bevelled mirrors, after the journey across fields, the wetting they had had, the muddy roads in the fading daylight. But what prevented him from enjoying as a true provincial the full comfort of the occasion was the ill-humour of the servant, the suspicious look she fixed on him, until Fanny sharply dismissed her with, "Leave us, Machaume, we will wait upon ourselves," and as the woman banged the door as she retired, she continued, "Do not mind her, she is angry because I am so fond of you: she says I am throwing away my life. These country people are so rapacious too. Her cooking is worth more than she is; just taste this jugged hare."

She helped him and uncorked the cham-

pagne, but quite forgot to help herself in her desire to see him eat ; at every movement she threw back to the shoulder the sleeves of Algerian gandour of white soft wool which she always wore in the house. Thus she recalled to him her first meeting with him at Déchelette's, and seated in the same easy-chair, eating from the same plate, they spoke of that evening

"Oh, as for myself," she said, "as soon as ever I saw you come in I felt I should like you. I felt like carrying you away at once, so that none of the others should have you. And what did you think when you saw me?"

At first he had been rather afraid of her : then he felt quite confidential—quite at home with her. "By the by," he added, "I never asked you why you were so annoyed at those verses of La Gournerie's?"

She frowned as she had done at the ball ; then with a toss of the head she answered, "Nonsense, do not say any more about it ;" then embracing him she continued, "I was rather afraid myself. I tried to get away and pull myself together : but I could not,—I never shall do it."

"Oh ! Never ?"

"You shall see."

He was satisfied to reply with the sceptical

smile of his age, not noticing the passionate, the almost menacing, accent which she placed on the words "You shall see." This womanly action was so gentle, so submissive, that he believed he had only to make a movement to free himself from her.

But to what end? He was so pleased in the abandonment of that voluptuous chamber, so deliciously stupefied by the caressing breath upon his eyelids which heavy with sleep were closed with fleeting visions of autumnal woods, meadows, water-mills, all the details of their day of love in the country.

In the morning he was suddenly awakened by Machaume calling out at the foot of the bed, in the most unconventional manner, "He is there : he says he *will* speak to you."

"What! He *will*? Then I am not in my own house : you have admitted him?"

She sprang up in a rage, rushed from the room half naked, her night-dress open.

"Stay where you are, my own, I will return," she said. But he did not wait until she came back, and scarcely felt comfortable until he in his turn had risen, dressed, and felt firm in his boots.

While he was collecting his clothes in that hermetically sealed room in which the night-

lamp was still disclosing the disorder of the supper-table, he could hear the sound of a fierce quarrel subdued by the hangings of the sitting-room. A man's voice, irritable at first, then imploring, in which the outbursts were choked with emotion in pleading, alternated with another voice which he did not immediately recognise, hard and hoarse, full of hatred and coarse epithets, and assailed his ears like a brawl in a low tavern.

All this amorous luxuriousness was tainted by this ; degraded like stains on silk ; and the woman was as low ; on the same level as those she had formerly contemned !

She came in again out of breath, twisting her flowing hair with a graceful movement. "What a fool a man is who cries !" she said. Then seeing Jean up and dressed she uttered a cry of rage—" You have got up ! Get into bed again at once, I desire it." Then suddenly calming she continued, caressing him with voice and gesture, " No, no : don't go away, you can't leave me thus ! I am sure you will never come back again if you do."

" Of course I shall : why shouldn't I ? "

" Swear to me that you are not angry—that you will return. Oh, how well I know you ! "

He swore what she desired, but he did not

get into bed again notwithstanding all her supplications, and the reiterated assurance that she was in her own house free to do as she pleased. At length she seemed resigned to his departure and accompanied him to the door, having nothing of the angry nymph in her now : on the contrary, being very humble, and seeking pardon from him !

A long and close embrace detained them in the ante-room.

“Well, when ?” she asked, as her eyes searched his to their depths. He was on the point of replying, or of lying, no doubt in his anxiety to get away, when a ring at the bell stopped him. Machaume came out of her kitchen, but Fanny made a sign to her not to open the door, and then they all three stood motionless and silent.

They heard a stifled complaint, then the rustling of a letter slipped under the door, and then slowly descending footsteps. “ Didn’t I tell you that I was free—look here ! ” She handed to her lover the letter which she had just opened, a poor love-letter, very humble, very meek, pencilled in haste upon the table of a café, in which the miserable individual begged pardon for his foolish behaviour that morning, acknowledged that he had no claim

upon her other than what she chose to grant of her own free will, begged humbly that she would not banish him for ever, promising to accept anything—resigned to everything—if only he did not lose her—O God, not to lose her!

“Would you believe it?” she said, with an evil laugh, which was sufficient to complete the isolation of the heart that she wished to subdue. Jean thought her cruel. He had not yet learnt that a woman who loves has no pity except for her love: all her feelings of charity, kindness, goodnature and pity and devotion are concentrated in one individual and one only.

“You are very wrong to laugh. This letter is horribly beautiful and heartrending.” Then in a graver tone he added, seizing her hand, ‘Look here: why do you drive him from you?’

“I don’t want him any more: I do not love him.”

“Nevertheless he was your lover. He placed you amid all this luxury in which you have lived and which is necessary to you.”

“My own,” she replied with that frank tone of hers, “when I did not know you I found all that very nice. Now it is a trouble,

a shame : my heart rejects it. Oh, I know you are about to say that you are not serious in this. That *you* do not love *me*, but that is my business ; whether you wish it or not I will make you love me."

He made no answer : arranged a meeting for the next day and left her : giving a few louis to Machaume—all his student's purse contained—in payment for the jugged hare. So far as he was concerned the affair was all over. What right had he to trouble this woman's existence, and what could he offer in exchange for what she had given up on his account ?

He wrote as much that very day, putting the case as gently and as plainly as he could, but without confessing to her that of their intimacy—of this light caprice—he had felt a great disgust, when, after his night of love, he had heard the sobs of the deceived lover mingling with her washerwoman's oaths.

In this big boy, brought up at a distance from Paris, in full Provençal style, there was some of his father's roughness and all the delicacy and nervousness of his mother whom he so greatly resembled. And to protect him against the allurements of pleasure he had before him the example of his father's brother

whose dissipation and folly had half ruined the family, and imperilled the honour of its name.

Uncle Cæsar ! With only these two words, and the family scenes they called up, one could obtain from Jean sacrifices much greater than the abandonment of a light love-affair to which he had never attached any great importance. But it was more difficult to break off than he fancied it would be.

Formally turned away : she came again undiscouraged by his refusals to see her by the closed door by the inexorable orders. "I have no self-respect," she wrote. She watched for the time of his meals at the restaurant waited in front of the café where he was reading the papers, and all this while no weeping, no scenes. If he were with a friend she simply followed him, watching for the moment when he would be again alone.

"Do you wish for me this evening ? No ? Then it must be another time." And she would go away with the quiet resignation of the pedlar who refastens his pack, leaving him the feeling of remorse at his own harshness and the humiliation of the falsehoods which he stammered out at every meeting. The approaching examination—the little time

before him. Afterwards: later on: if she still wished it—in fact he had made up his mind that when he had succeeded in passing he would take a month's holiday in the South, and she would forget him in that time.

Unfortunately when the examination was



passed Jean fell sick. A neglected chill, caught in a passage at the Ministerial offices, took a bad turn. He knew no one in Paris except the few students from his own neighbourhood whom his exigent *liaison* had estranged and kept away. Besides, here was

need for more than common attention, and from the very first it was Fanny Legrand who



took her place at his bedside, and did not quit it for ten days, nursing him untiringly without

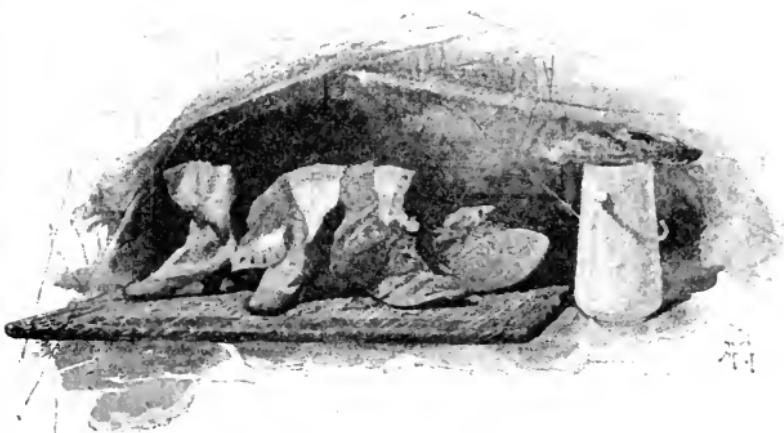
fear or disgust, as adroitly as a hospital nurse, with the tender blandishments which, sometimes, in his paroxysms of fear carried him back to a serious illness of his youthful days, and made him address her as Aunt Divonne, and say, "Thank you, Divonne," when he felt Fanny's hands upon his clammy forehead.

"It is not Divonne: it is I: I am tending you." She saved him from mercenary care, from the chances of extinguished fires, or drinks made up in the porter's lodge: and Jean could never reconcile to his mind the quickness and readiness of those hands of indolence and voluptuousness. At night she slept for two hours on the sofa—a lodging house article of furniture—and as soft as the plank bed of the police cell.

"But my poor Fanny, don't you ever go home then?" he asked one day. "I am better now: you ought to reassure Machaume."

She laughed! There had been fine times at home. Machaume gone, and the whole house too! They had sold everything, furniture, effects, even the bedding. There remained to her only the dress which she

had on her back and a little linen which the maid has saved. Now if he sent her away she must go into the street.



III



"I THINK I have found it this time ; Rue d'Amsterdam opposite the railway terminus. Three rooms and a large balcony. If you wish we will go there and see it after you have finished your official duties. It is high up—five flights—but you can carry me. That was so delicious ! Do you remember?"

And very pleased with the reminiscence she crept close to him, nestling in his neck, seeking the old place—her place.

In furnished lodgings, with the manners of the quarter, the “trapsing” up and down of slip-shod females, the paper partition behind which other lodgers swarmed; the promiscuous mingling of keys, of candles, and of boots, living together had become intolerable. Not to her though : with Jean, the roof, the cellar, even the sewer would have been acceptable to her. But the delicacy of the lover was offended by certain things which as a single man he would not have thought of. Those one-night lodgers annoyed him, dishonoured his house, and gave rise to the same sadness and disgust which he experienced when watching the monkeys in the Jardin des Plantes grimacing and mimicking the gestures and expressions of human affection. The restaurant also bored him ; the meals which he had to go and eat twice a day on the Boulevard Saint-Michel in a large room filled with students, art pupils, artists, architects, who without being on speaking terms with him had known him by sight for the last twelvemonth during which he had taken his meals there.



He would blush—when he opened the door—as all eyes were bent on Fanny, and entered with the aggressive shyness of all young men who are accompanied by a woman: and he also feared to meet one of his official chiefs or some one from his native district. Then the question of economy arose.

"How dear it is," she would say every time, as she came away and commented on the bill for the dinner. "If we had a home of our own, I could have kept house for three days for the same sum."

"Well, what prevents us?" So they set about looking for a domicile.

That is the trap. Every one is caught in it, the best, the most conscientious by this instinct of propriety, the taste for "home" which has been circulated by family education and the warmth of the domestic hearth.

The flat on the Rue d'Amsterdam was taken immediately and found delightful, notwithstanding that the rooms opened into each other and looked outward, the kitchen and the sitting-room on a damp back-yard where arose from a gin-shop the odour of slops and chlorine—the bedroom on the steep noisy thoroughfare shaken day and night by goods-

vans, drays, cabs, omnibuses ; pierced by the whistling of the arriving and departing trains, all the uproar of the Western Railway Terminus, with its glazed roof, the colour of dirty water, opposite. The advantage was in knowing that the railway was at their very door, and St. Cloud, Ville d'Avray, Saint Germain, the country stations on the banks of the Seine, almost under their balcony. For they had a balcony, large and roomy, which, thanks to the liberality of former proprietors, boasted a zinc awning painted like striped calico, dripping and depressing beneath wintry skies, but under which it would be very comfortable to dine in summer, in the open air as in a mountain chalet.

They occupied themselves in furnishing. Jean having told his relatives of his projects of housekeeping, Aunt Divonne, who was the steward of his father's house, sent the necessary funds ; and her letter announced at the same time the early arrival of a chest of drawers, a wardrobe, and a large cane arm-chair taken from the "Windy Chamber" for the Parisian.

This chamber, which he could remember at the end of a passage at Castelet, never used, the shutters closely barred, the door locked

—was open in consequence of its situation to the gusts of the mistral, which caused it to quiver like the lantern of a lighthouse. In it was accumulated the lumber which every succeeding generation of the family relegated to oblivion in the face of new acquisitions.

Ah, if Divonne had but known what singular siestas would be enjoyed in the cane arm chair! What small petticoats and frilled underclothing would be stowed in the Empire chest of drawers. But Gaussin's remorse was stifled in the thousand little pleasures of furnishing and occupancy.

It was so delightful after office business to set off in the dusk on long journeys arm in arm to some by-street to choose the dining-room furniture, the side-board, the table and six chairs; or curtains of flowered cretonne for the window and the bed. He would have taken everything on trust: but Fanny had eyes for both. She tried the chairs, and the sliding leaves of the table, and developed quite a bargaining spirit.

She was acquainted with houses where one could obtain at trade prices a kitchen range complete for a small family; four iron saucepans, the fifth lined with enamel for the

matutinal chocolate : none of copper, it takes so long to clean ! Six forks and spoons of metal with the soup ladle, and two dozen plates, English china, strong and of gay pattern : all these things packed up together like a doll's dinner service. For toilet and table linen she knew a shopkeeper, the representative of a large manufacturer at Roubaix, who might be paid at so much a month : and, always watching for sales, in search of those remains of shipwreck which Paris casts continually into the foam of her breakers, she discovered in the Boulevard de Clichy a splendid bed almost new, and big enough to accommodate in a row the seven daughters of the ogre.

After his return from his office he also attempted to make some purchases, but he did not understand it, not knowing how to say no, or how to leave without purchasing anything. One day he entered a second-hand shop to purchase a cruet-stand which she had noted, and he brought back instead of the cruet-stand, which had been already disposed of, a lustre with pendants for the drawing-room, a very useless article to them as they had no drawing-room.

"We will hang it in the verandah," said Fanny to console him.

Then the enjoyment of taking measurements, the discussions respecting the position of a piece of furniture, and the cries, the foolish laughter, the uplifting of hands when they perceived that notwithstanding all precautions, notwithstanding the supposed complete list of necessary purchases, there had always been something forgotten.

It was thus with the sugar-rasp. Fancy setting up house without a sugar-grater !

Then—everything purchased and put in its place the curtains hung, a wick in the new lamp, how glorious it was when they installed themselves : the minute inspection of the three little rooms before they went to bed, and how she laughed as she held him a light to bolt the door by. "Another turn : another : shut it firmly. Let us be indeed at home."

Then this was such a new and delicious existence. After leaving his work he came home quickly, eager to arrive, and sit in slippers by the fire. And in the black sloppiness of the street he pictured their room warmed and lighted, lighted up by the old provincial furniture which Fanny had thought would be only in the way, and which turned out to be

very old and handsome pieces : particularly the wardrobe, which was a Louis XVI. gem



with painted panels representing Provençal fêtes, shepherds in flowered coats dancing to

the music of the flute and tambourine. The presence of these old-fashioned things, familiar to his youthful eyes, recalled his paternal mansion, and consecrated his new residence of which he was to taste the enjoyment

As soon as he rang the bell Fanny would come carefully, coquettishly, dressed, "on the spot" as she used to say. Her dress of black woollen material, very plain, but cut after a good style—the simplicity of a woman who had dressed properly, the sleeves turned back and the skirt protected by a white apron : for she did their cooking herself, and only had a charwoman for the dirty work which chaps, or spoils the shape of, the hands.

She was quite an adept at cooking—knew a number of recipes, Northern or Southern dishes as varied as her collection of popular ditties which, when dinner was over and the white apron hung up behind the closed door of the kitchen, she chaunted in her fascinating and passionate contralto.

Below was the murmur of the street, the torrent of traffic. The cold rain pattered upon the zinc verandah ; and Gaussin, his feet to the fire, extended in his arm-chair, watched the windows of the station opposite, and the clerks bending over their writing

beneath the white light of the large reflectors.

He was well: he permitted himself to be soothed. In love? No: but thankful for the love that surrounded him, for the never changing affection. How had he been able to deprive himself so long of this happiness in the fear—at which he now laughed—of some entanglement or some obstacle? Was not his life much more respectable than when he went from one flame to another endangering his health?

No danger in the future. In three years, when he would go away, the breaking of the bond would come naturally and without any shock. Fanny was forewarned; they had talked it over together as they talked of death, of a distant, but certain, fatality. There remained the great grief that those at home would experience when they learned that he was not living alone, his father's indignation—so stern and so quick.

But how could they know it? Jean saw no one in Paris. His father, “the Consul,” as they called him in his own place, was detained at home all the year by the necessity for superintending the very considerable domain which he cultivated, and by his tough

battles with the vines. His mother, helpless, unable to move a step unaided, had to leave Divonne the superintendence of the house, and the care of the little twin-sisters Martha and Mary, whose unexpected birth had for ever deprived their mother of her strength. As for uncle Cesaire, Divonne's husband, he was a great baby, who was not permitted to travel alone.

And Fanny now knew all the family. When he received a letter from Castelet, to the end of which the twins had added a few lines in their large characters, she would read it over his shoulder and was affected by it as he was. Of her own life he knew nothing, did not make any inquiries. He had the beautiful unconscious egotism of his youth without any jealousy, without disquiet. Full of his own life he let it run over, thought aloud, let himself go, while she remained silent.

So the days and weeks passed on in a happy quietude, troubled for a moment by one circumstance which affected them both deeply but in a different manner. She believed herself *enceinte*, and told him so with such delight that he could not but share it. In his heart he was afraid of it. A child—at his age? What could he do with it? Ought

he to recognise it? And what a tie it would be between this woman and himself; what a complication in the future!

Suddenly his fetters became visible to him, heavy, cold, and riveted. At night he could not sleep any more than she, and side by side in their big bed they lay dreamily with their eyes open, a thousand leagues apart!

Fortunately this false alarm was not repeated, and they resumed their peaceful and deliciously close existence. Then winter passed away, the real sun came again. Their apartment was prettier still, enlarged by the balcony and awning.

In the evening they dined there under the green-tinted sky, which was flecked with the twittering swallows.

The street exhaled warm airs, and all the sounds from the neighbouring houses; but the least sigh of the wind was for them, and they forgot the time as they sat close together, unconscious of everything but themselves. Jean recalled the evenings like those on the banks of the Rhone, dreamt of consular appointments in hot and distant lands, of the decks of vessels sailing away over which the wind would blow in those long breaths which shook the awning. And

when she would murmur “Do you love me?” he would recall himself from afar to reply, “Oh yes: I love you.” That is what it is to take them so young: they have so many ideas in their heads at once.

On the same balcony, separated from them by the iron lattice-work, entwined with climbing plants, another couple were billing and cooing, Monsieur and Madame Hettéma, married people, very stout, who kissed loudly. Most wonderfully mated in age, tastes, and in generally heavy appearance, it was touching to hear these lovers at the end of youthfulness, supporting each other by old sentimental songs.

“But I hear her sigh in the shade,
It is a sweet dream, ah, let me sleep.”

These people were agreeable to Fanny and she would like to know them. Sometimes even she and her neighbour would exchange, beneath the iron barrier, the smiles of loving and happy women: but the men as usual were more stiff, and did not address each other.

Jean was returning one afternoon from the Quai d'Orsay, when he heard himself called by name at the corner of the Rue Royale. It was a beautiful day—a warm

light in which Paris was opening out at this corner of the boulevard, which towards eventide on a fine day, about the hour for the Bois, has no equal in the world.

“Sit down, beautiful youth, and drink : the sight of you is good for one’s eyes.”

Two great arms arrested him, extending from the awning of a café which encroached on the pavement with its three rows of tables. He made no resistance, being flattered to hear around him the crowd of provincials, strangers, striped suits and round hats, whispering Caoudal’s name with curiosity.

The sculptor, seated at the table, with a glass of absinthe, which harmonised with his military appearance and his officer’s rosette, had for a neighbour Déchelette the engineer, who had reached Paris the day before. He was the same as ever, sun-burnt, yellow, his high cheek-bones making his small eyes more prominent, his greedy nose sniffing Paris again. As soon as the young man had seated himself Caoudal, pointing at him in comic anger, exclaimed,

“Isn’t he handsome—the creature? Fancy that I was once his age and as curly! Oh, youth, youth!”

"Still harping on the same string," exclaimed Déchelette, smiling at his friend's hobby.



"My dear fellow, don't laugh. I would give all I am worth, medals, decorations, the

Institute, all, for that hair and that colour." Then turning abruptly to Gaussin he said,

"What have you done with Sappho? One never sees her now!"

Jean stared at him without comprehending him. "Are you not together still?" and perceiving his evident astonishment he added impatiently, "Sappho—come now—Fanny Legrand—Ville d'Avray."

"Oh, that's done with—long ago."

How came he to tell such a lie? From a feeling of shame, of uneasiness at the name of Sappho applied to his mistress; from a distaste for discussing her with other men, perhaps also from the wish to learn something which otherwise they would not have mentioned to him.

"Eh! Sappho! She is in the swim still then?" said Déchelette absently, full of the delight of again seeing the steps of the Madeleine, the flower-market, the long vista of the boulevards edged with foliage.

"Don't you recollect she was at your party last year? She was superb as a Fellah woman, and one morning in the autumn when I found her breakfasting with this handsome fellow at Langlois' you would have fancied her a fifteen days' bride."

"How old is she then ? Considering the years one has known her—"

Caoudal looked sky-ward to calculate. "How old? how old? Let me see. Seventeen in '53, when she sat as my model, and this is '73—so reckon it up." Then his eyes glistened. "Ah, if you had but seen her twenty years ago, tall, slender, the true Cupid's bow of her mouth, the bold forehead. Arms, shoulders—a little thin perhaps, but that was all the more suitable for the burning Sappho. And the woman ! the mistress ! what was there not in that delightful flesh ! what fire could not be struck from that flint ; from that key-board in which not a note was wanting. 'The whole gamut,' as Gournerie used to say."

Jean, very pale, asked, "Was he her lover too ?"

"La Gournerie ? I should think so—rather. I suffered enough on his account ! For four years we lived together like man and wife —four years I took care of her, ruined myself to satisfy her caprices, singing masters, music masters, riding—and what not. And when I had her polished, fined down, like a precious stone cut to shape : cleansed from the gutter where I found her

one night in front of the Bal Ragache—that rhymester came and took her from the table whereat he was welcomed every Sunday ! ”

He breathed very hard, as if he thus would chase away the old tenderness which still vibrated in his voice ; then he resumed more calmly :

“ At any rate his dishonourable conduct availed him nothing. Their three years of housekeeping was an *inferno*. The poet, for all his taking ways, was mean, vicious, and a maniac. You should have seen them tearing each other’s hair ! When one called one found her with a bandage over her eye and he with a torn, scratched face. But the beauty of it all was when he wished to separate from her. She stuck to him like a burr, followed him about, nearly knocking down his door to get in, and she would lie on his door-mat waiting for him. One night in mid-winter she stayed for five hours outside the Farcy when the whole set of them had gone up. A pity ! But the elegiac poet remained implacable, even going so far one day as to put the case into the hands of the police to rid himself of her. A nice gentleman he was ! And as a final act—thank-offering to this beautiful young girl

who had given him the best of her youth, her intelligence, and herself—he emptied upon her head a volume of drivelling, spiteful verses and lamentations called the *Book of Love*, his best work!"

Gaussin sat motionless listening, sucking, through a long straw, the iced beverage which



Ressy

had been placed before him. Surely they had put in it some poison which was freezing his very heart and vitals!

He was shivering, notwithstanding the beautiful weather, and beholding in a blurred way, as shades that went and came, a water-cart in front of the Madeleine, and the carriages passing and repassing upon the pavement as

silently as if they were driven upon cotton-wool. Paris was silent, there was no sound beyond the voices at table. Now Déchelette was speaking, he was pouring out the poison this time !

“What terrible things are these ruptures !” His quiet and mocking tone assumed an expression of softness and infinite pitifulness. “Two people live for years together in closest companionship. They have told each other everything, given each other everything. They have gained habits, modes of living, of speaking, from each other—they have even become alike in features. They are united hand and foot—cemented together. Then suddenly they part—are torn asunder. How do they do it—how have they the resolution ? For my part I never could do such a thing . . Yes, deceived, outraged, pelted with ridicule and abuse, if the woman were to weep and beg me to remain, I would not leave her . . And that is why, when I do ally myself with one, it is only for a night. No to-morrow—as they used to say in old France—or else marriage. It is definite and more correct.”

“No to-morrow—no to-morrow ! You are talking at random. There are women you

cannot keep only for one night. *Her*, for instance."

"I did not give her a moment's grace," said Déchelette, with a placid smile which the poor lover thought fiendish.

"Then you were not to her taste, for she is a girl who when she loves, she clings tightly. She has a taste for housekeeping, nevertheless she has no luck that way. She tried it with Dejoie the novelist—he died. She passed on to Ezano—he married : afterwards came the handsome Flamant, the engraver, formerly a model,—for she always had a bias for talent and good looks—and you know the terrible sequel."

"What?" asked Gaussin in a choking voice, as he addressed himself to his straw again, while listening to the drama of love which thrilled Paris a few years ago.

"The engraver was poor—mad upon the girl—and for fear of being dropped he forged bank-notes to keep her in luxury. Discovered almost immediately, he was, with her, arrested : he got ten years' imprisonment, and she had six months at St. Lazare her innocence having been proved."

And Caoudal reminded Déchelette—who

had been present at the trial—how pretty she had looked in the prison headdress of St. Lazare, and brave, not cringing, faithful to her companion to the last. Her reply to the old owl of a judge, and the kiss which she threw to Flamant over the cocked hats of the gendarmes, crying to him in a voice sad enough to soften a heart of stone—“Don’t be down-hearted, my own ; the happy days will return and we shall love each other again.” All the same she had been rather disgusted with her housekeeping, poor girl !

“Since that time launched into fast society, she has taken lovers by the month, the week,—and never artists. She has a horror of them ! I believe I was the only one whom she continued to see. At distant intervals she would come and smoke a cigarette in the studio. Then I did not hear of her again for months, until one day when I met her with this handsome lad at breakfast, eating grapes from his mouth. Then I said to myself, ‘There is my Sappho bitten again.’ ”

Jean could not listen to any more of this. He felt he was dying from the effects of the poison he had absorbed. After the cold he had felt, he had now a burning sensation in

his chest, which ascended to his head that was buzzing, and felt as if it would split like an iron plate heated white-hot. He crossed the street, staggering under the carriage-wheels. Some drivers shouted—to whom were they calling, the fools !

Passing the market by the Madeleine he was irritated by the odour of heliotrope, the scent preferred by his mistress. He hurried on to escape it, and maddened, torn by his emotions, he thought aloud—My mistress? yes ; a nice thing. Sappho, Sappho ! To think that I have lived a year with a creature like her ! He repeated the name angrily, remembering that he had read it in the low-class papers amongst other women's nicknames—in the grotesque Almanach de Gotha of fast society : Sappho, Cora, Caro, Phryne Jeanne de Poitiers, le Phoque. . . !

And with the letters of her abominable name, all the life of this woman passed in a disgusting way before his eyes. The studio of Caoudal, the quarrels with La Gournerie, the watches of the night passed before the door, or on the mat, of the poet. Then the good-looking engraver, the forgeries, the assize-court, and the little prison headdress which so well became her ; the kiss she had wasted

to her forger, with the message, “Don’t be downhearted, my own.” The same name the same caress which she bestowed on *him*! What a disgrace! Ah, he was going to sweep away all this dirt completely, and the smell of heliotrope continually pursued him in a twilight of the same pale lilac as the little flower.

Suddenly he discovered that he was still pacing the market like the deck of a ship. He resumed his way home, arrived in a flash at the Rue d’Amsterdam his mind made up to expel this woman from his rooms, to cast her out upon the staircase without any explanation, thrusting upon her the insult of her name. At the door he hesitated, reflected, passed on a few paces. She would cry out, sob, and let loose upon the house all her vocabulary of the gutter, as she had already done yonder in the Rue de l’Arcade

Write! yes: the very thing: it would be better to write, he would settle the business in four ferocious words. He entered an English beer-shop, deserted and mournful, under the gas-light which was being turned on—seated himself at a smeared table near the only customer, who was a girl with a

death's head, devouring smoked salmon without drinking anything. He called for a pint of ale, did not touch it, and commenced



a letter. But too many words would come and wanted to find expression all at once, which the thick clotted ink traced as slowly as possible.

He tore up two or three beginnings, was going out without having written, when in a low voice close to him a full and greedy mouth said timidly, "You are not drinking, may I have a sip?" He made a sign in the affirmative. The girl snatched at the pint measure and emptied it in one hasty draught, an action that revealed the distress of the unfortunate who had just money enough in her pocket to purchase some food without moistening it with a little beer. A feeling of pity came into his heart and softened him, suddenly revealed to him the miseries of a woman's life, and he set himself to judge more humanely, to reason with his trouble.

After all she had told him no falsehoods—and if he knew nothing of her life it was because he had never troubled himself about it. What should he reproach her with? Her time at St. Lazare? But as she had been acquitted—carried out almost in triumph, what then? With other men before him? Did not he know all about that? What reason had he to bear a greater grudge against her because the names of these lovers were known, celebrated; because he might meet with them, speak to them, see their portraits

in the windows—? Ought he to think it a crime for her to have preferred such men?

And at the bottom of his heart there uprose an unspeakable, bad pride at the idea of sharing with her these great artists, saying to himself that they had found her beautiful! At his age one is never sure—one has not much experience. One loves the woman, and love; but the perception of things and the experience are wanting; and the young lover who shows you the portrait of his mistress seeks a look and some approbation to reassure him. The figure of Sappho seemed to him greater, encircled by a glory, since he knew that she had been sung by La Gournerie and modelled by Caoudal in marble or in bronze.

But quickly seized with anger, once more, he quitted the bench upon which he had thrown himself in an exterior boulevard amid the children, the gossiping wives of workpeople in the dusty June evening, and resumed his way talking loudly, furiously. A pretty thing indeed that bronze of Sappho—bronze of commerce—which had been dragged everywhere, as common as the tunes in a street organ, as the word itself, Sappho, which by the force of rolling descent through

ages is incrusted with unclean legends, and has degenerated from the name of a goddess to that of a malady. How disgusting is all this!

He proceeded thus, calm or furious by turns, in this whirligig of ideas and adverse sentiments. The boulevard became dark and deserted—a sickly odour hung in the hot air, and he recognised the gates of the large cemetery whither he had come the year before with all the youth of Paris to see the inauguration of a bust by Caoudal on the tomb of Dejoie, the novelist of the Latin Quarter, the author of *Cinderinette*. Dejoie, Caoudal! What a strange sound the names of these two men had for him during the last two hours! and so too appeared false and mournful the history of the student and his housekeeping, now that he had become acquainted with the sad facts beneath the surface: since he had learnt from Déchelette the horrible name bestowed upon these “marriages of the pavement.”

The darkness, intensified now by the neighbourhood of Death, frightened him. He returned the way he had come, rubbing against working people who were sauntering about silently as the wings of night: sordid

dresses at the doors of hovels, the dirty windowpanes of which threw gleams as from magic lanterns on couples who were embracing each other as he passed them. What time is it? He felt fagged out like a recruit after drill, and his smothered grief, fallen as it were into his



Russell

limbs, he was only conscious of their stiffness. Oh, if he could only lie down and sleep. Then when he awoke coldly, his anger passed, he would say to the woman, "There, I know what you are. It is neither your fault nor mine, but we can no longer live together.

Let us part." And to put himself beyond her reach he would go and see his mother and sisters, and shake off in the breezes of the Rhone, in the free and stimulating mistral, the pollution and the fright of his bad dream.

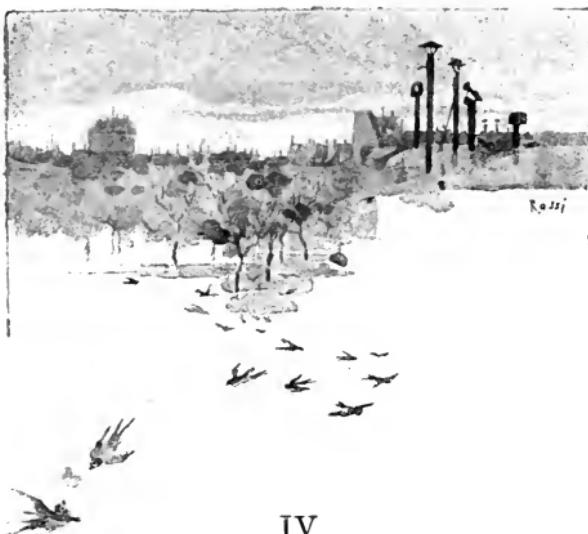
She had gone to bed weary of waiting for him, and was sleeping full in the lamp light, an open book lying on the counterpane. His approach did not disturb her; and standing by the bed he gazed at her curiously as at a woman new to him—a stranger who had come thither.

Beautiful, oh, beautiful the arms, the neck, the shoulders like fine amber without spot or blemish. But beneath those eyelids, reddened perhaps by her reading, perhaps by her uneasiness or waiting—upon those features in repose and from which had passed away the strong desire of the woman who wished to be loved—what lassitude, what confessions! Her age, her history, her excesses, her caprices! St. Lazare, the blows, the tears, the terrors, all were visible; and the deep markings of dissipation and sleeplessness, and the curl of distaste dropping the under lip, worn out, spent like a fountain at which the whole

parish has been drinking, and the commencement of the bloated look which loosens the flesh for the wrinkles of age. . .

This treachery of sleep wrapped in the silence of death ; it was grand, it was sinister —a field of battle by night, with all the horror which shows itself, and all that which is imagined in the vague movements of the shadows.

And suddenly there came upon the poor young man an irresistible, a suffocating, desire to weep



IV

THEY were finishing dinner, the window was open, the twittering swallows were saluting the dying day. Jean was not speaking, but he intended to do so, and always of that same cruel thing which haunted him and with which he had tormented Fanny ever since the meeting with Caoudal. She perceiving his eyes cast down and his simulated air of indifference, divined his thoughts and anticipated him.

“Listen : I know what you are going to tell me ; spare us I beg ; one wears oneself out in the end. Since all that is dead and over

and I love no one but you—since there is no one but you in the whole world—”

“ If it were dead as you say—all this past ! ” and he gazed into the depths of her lovely grey eyes, which glistened and changed at every expression, “ you would not cherish the things which recall it, yes, over there in your wardrobe.”

The grey eyes looked black.

“ You know that, then ? ”

So that collection of love-letters, photographs, those glorious love-archives of her past life, saved from so many breakings-up, must then be destroyed !

“ At least you will credit me afterwards ! ”

When she perceived his incredulous smile, she hurried away to seek the lacquered box, of which the picked out iron-work had so greatly puzzled her lover during the last few days when he beheld it amongst the delicate folds of her linen.

“ Burn ; tear ; do what you please ! ”

But he was in no hurry to turn the little key ; he was looking at the designs of cherry trees with mother of pearl fruit and the flying storks worked in on the lid. Then he opened it suddenly.

Every style and character of writing were

there ; tinted paper with illuminated headings, old yellow *billet*s creased in the folding, scratches with pencil on the leaves of notebooks : *cartes de visite* in heaps without order as a drawer continually turned out might be, and into which he was now dipping his trembling hands.



"Pass them over to me : I will burn them before your eyes."

She spoke feverishly, kneeling down in front of the stove, a lighted candle was by her side on the floor.

"Give me—."

But he said, "No, wait!" Then in a lower tone and as if he were rather ashamed of himself, he added.—

"I wish to read them."

"Why? You will only worry yourself again."

She was thinking only of his pain, and not of the indelicacy of letting him see these secrets of passion, the bed-confessions of all these men who had loved her: and coming nearer to him—still on her knees—she read with him, watching him closely from the corners of her eyes.

Ten pages signed La Gournerie, 1861, in a long feline hand; in which the poet, who had been despatched to Algeria to give a metrical and official account of the journey of the Emperor and the Empress, gave his mistress a stirring description of the festivities.

Algiers overflowing and crowded—a true Bagdad of the "Thousand and One Nights," all Africa assembled, encircling the town—rushing against the gates as if it would burst them with the force of a simoon. Caravans of negroes and camels laden with gum; tents of hides; a smell of human musk hanging over all this menagerie which had encamped by the sea-side; dancing at night in the gleam of huge fires, dispersing every morning when the chiefs of the South arrived.

like Magi in Oriental pomp: discordant music, reed instruments, little harsh drums, the Goum surrounding the tricoloured standard of the Prophet—and in the rear, held in lassoes by negroes, the horses destined for the “Emberour,” with silk cloths, silver caparisons, and shaking at every pace their bells and trappings.

The genius of the poet put this all as a reality: the words sparkled on the page like diamonds exhibited by a merchant. Well might the woman at whose feet all these riches were cast feel proud. Must not she have been loved indeed, since notwithstanding the unique character of these *fêtes*, the poet thought only of her, and was dying to see her again?

“Oh, this very night I was with you in the grand divan in the Rue de l’Arcade. You were naked, maddened, and crying out with delight under my caresses, but when I awoke I was rolling in a rug on my terrace under the stars. The cry of the muezzin was ascending from a neighbouring minaret, in clear and limpid tones, voluptuous rather than devotional, and it was you I heard as I awoke from my dream.”

What evil spirit incited him to continue to read, notwithstanding the horrible jealousy that blanched his lips, and caused his hands to clench? Gently, in a coaxing way, Fanny endeavoured to take away the letter, but he read it to the very end, and after it another, then another, letting them fall as soon as he had finished, one by one, in contempt and indifference, without paying any attention to the flames which roared up in the chimney from the lyrical and passionate effusions of the celebrated poet. And occasionally, when his passion boiled over at African heat, the lover's communications would be infected with some gross indelicacy of the guard-house, which would have much surprised and scandalised the fashionable readers of the *Book of Love*, with its refined spiritualism, pure as the silvered peak of the Jungfrau.

Miseries of the heart! At these passages Jean paused chiefly, at these blots on the page, without dreaming of the nervous twitchings which puckered his face. He actually had the fortitude to sneer at the postscript, which succeeded a glowing description of the Feast of Aissaouas. "I

have re-read my letter, there are really some rather good things in it—put it aside for me, I may make use of it perhaps."

"A gentleman who lets no chance slip," said Jean, as he passed on to another sheet of the same writing, in which in the cold tone of a man of business La Gournerie requested the return of a volume of Arab songs and a pair of rice-straw slippers. This was the winding up of their love affairs. Ah, he had known when to retire ; he was strong—that man !

And without stopping Jean continued to drain the cesspool whence arose such a noisome and unwholesome vapour. At nightfall he put the candle on the table and read some short notes almost illegibly traced, as with a stiletto, by heavy fingers which at every moment in the roughness of passion perforated and tore the paper. The first occasions of the meetings with Caoudal, assignations, suppers, picnics, then quarrels, suppliant returnings, appeals, insults coarse and common, interspersed all at once by drollery, jokes and piteous reproaches, all the weakness of the great artist laid out at the time of his dismissal and abandonment.

The fire seized that too : darting out great red jets of flame in which were smoking

and frizzling the flesh, the blood, the tear of a man of genius; but what did it matter to Fanny, also devoted to her young lover, whose ardent fever burned through her clothing? He found a portrait there executed in pen and ink and signed Gavarni, with this inscription, "To my friend Fanny Legrand, in an inn at Dampierre one wet day." An intelligent and melancholy head, with hollow eyes, and something bitter and worn about it.

"Who is this?"

"André Dejoie: I have kept it because of the signature."

"Oh, you may keep it and welcome," he said, in so hard and unhappy a tone that she snatched the drawing and threw it, in pieces, on the fire, while he plunged into the correspondence of the novelist; a heart-rending series of letters dated from winter resorts and watering-places whither the writer had been sent for his health, and had grown desperate in his physical and moral distress, racking his brains to find ideas so far away from Paris and mixing up demands for potions, prescriptions, anxiety about his money or his work, the transmission of proofs, renewal of bills—always the same desire and adoration for the

beautiful body of Sappho which the doctors forbade him.

Jean muttered, enraged, and rudely,—

“What on earth was the matter with all these men that they should come after you in this manner ?”

That was for him the sole signification of these despairing letters, confessing the derangement of one of those glorious existences which men young envy, and of which young and romantic women dream. Yes, what was the matter with them ? What had she given them to drink ? He experienced all the horrible suffering of a man who sees the woman he loves outraged, and nevertheless he could not make up his mind to empty at one stroke, with eyes shut, the papers which remained.

Now came the turn of the engraver, who miserable, unknown, with no reputation save through the *Police Gazette* only owed his place in the shrine in virtue of the great love which she had for him. Very disgraceful were those letters dated from Mazas, and as stupid, awkward and sentimental as those of a recruit to his girl. But one felt that through all these romantic lucubrations there was a strain of sincerity in the passion, a

respect for the woman, a forgetfulness of self which distinguished the convict from the others. Thus, when he begged Fanny's pardon for his crime in having loved her too well, or when from the Palais de Justice, just after condemnation, he wrote how pleased he was to hear that she was liberated. He made no complaint, he had had, thanks to her, in her company, two years of such deep and perfect bliss that the memory of them was sufficient to fill up the measure of his existence, to assuage the horrors of his fate—and he wound up by asking a favour of her :

“ You know that I have a child in the country, whose mother died a long while ago. He lives with an old relative in such an out-of-the-way corner that they will never hear what has happened to me. I sent them the money I had left, saying that I was going out of the country far away, and I look to you, my dear Nini, to ascertain from time to time how this little fellow is, and to send me news of him.”

As a proof of Fanny's interest followed a letter of thanks, and another which was quite recent and dated only six months before. “ Oh, how kind of you to have come ! How pretty you looked, and how nice in comparison with

my prison garb of which I am so greatly ashamed . . ." Then Jean burst out furiously,



interrupting his reading by, "You have continued to see him then?"

“ Now and then, just for charity’s sake.”

“ Even since we have been living together ?”

“ Yes, once ; only once in the visiting room where only they let you see people.”

“ Ah, you are a nice girl !”

The idea that notwithstanding their connection, she continued to visit the forger, exasperated him more than all the rest. He was too proud to say so, but a packet of letters, the last, tied with blue ribbon across the fine sloping writing—a woman’s hand—let loose all his anger.

“ I change my tunic after the chariot race : come to my room.”

“ No, no ; don’t read that !”

She leaped upon him, snatched the packet from him and threw it on the fire before he could understand it all, even when he beheld her on her knees, reddened by the reflection of the fire as well as by the shame of her avowal.

“ I was young—it was Caoudal, the great fool. I did whatever he wished.”

Only then he understood, and became very pale.

“ Ah yes : Sappho ! the whole ‘gamut,’”—and spurning her from him like an unclean

animal, he said, “Leave me, do not touch me, you disgust me !”

Her cry of pain was lost in a terrible peal of thunder ; very near and prolonged ; at the same moment a vivid flame illuminated the apartment. Fire ! She jumped up in terror, seized mechanically the water-bottle on the table and emptied it upon the papers, the flame of which had set the soot of last winter’s fires alight : then the water-can and the jugs : but seeing her efforts were fruitless, she rushed out on the balcony screaming “Fire! Fire !”

The Hettémas came in first, then the concierge, and then the police. They cried out “Let the register down, get out on the roof. Water ! water ! no, a blanket.”

Quite confounded they continued to stare at the soiled and crowded room : then, when the alarm was over, the fire extinguished, the black crowd below, under the gas in the street, dispersed, and the neighbours, reassured, gone back to their houses, the two lovers in the mingled mess of water, soot, disarranged and dripping furniture, felt disheartened and exhausted, without energy to resume the quarrel, or to tidy the apartment. Something ominous and vile had come into their life,

and that evening, forgetting their former repugnance, they went and slept at the lodging-house.

The sacrifice Fanny had made did not have any good result. From the letters he had burnt and otherwise destroyed, whole sentences kept recurring to his memory, mounted to his face in rushes of blood, as certain passages in bad books will do. And those former lovers of his mistress were almost all celebrated men. The dead ones arose again, the names and likenesses of those still living were everywhere : people spoke of them before him, and every time he experienced a feeling of uneasiness, as he might have felt in the sad rupture of some family tie.

This trouble sharpened his senses and his eyes. He soon began to notice in Fanny traces of former influences ; and the words, ideas, and habits, which she had retained. That habit she had of sticking out her thumb, as if to mould or fashion the thing of which she was speaking was a trick learned from the sculptor, with the expression, "You can see that!" From Dejoie she had contracted the habit of "clipping" her words, and the popular songs which he had made known

in every corner of France. From La Gournerie she had learned that haughty and scornful intonation, and that severity of criticism upon modern literature.

She had assimilated all these, superposing the disparities by the same principles of stratification which enable us to learn the age, and the different systems of the earth, and the geological strata: and perhaps she was not so intellectual as she had at first seemed to him to be. But it was scarcely a question of intelligence: foolish and vulgar, ten years older, she would equally have held him by the strength of her past, by the low jealousy which was consuming him, and of which he could no longer restrain the irritation nor the upbraiding, which burst out on every occasion against one or the other.

Dejoie's novels sold no longer! the whole issue was going begging at twenty-five centimes a copy! And that old fool Caoudal—fancy his troubling himself about love at his age! "You know he has no teeth now! He eats like a goat with the front of his mouth. His talent had deserted him. What a failure his *Nymph* at the *Salon* was! "It would not hold together"—this was an expression he had picked up from her, as she

had learnt it from the sculptor. When he was thus criticising his former rivals, Fanny agreed with him to please him, and this lad, ignorant of art, of life, of everything; this girl, with the superficial polish of the talent of those famous artists, might have been heard criticising them with an air of superior judgment, and condemning them oracularly.

But Gaussin's real enemy was Flamant the forger. Of him he only knew that he was very handsome, as fair as himself, that he was addressed as "my own," that she went to see him in secret, and that when he attacked him in the same way as the rest, calling him the "sentimental convict" or the "handsome prisoner," Fanny turned away her head without replying. Then he began to accuse his mistress of preserving her regard for the forger, and she was obliged to explain gently, but with a certain firmness in her voice :

" You know quite well, Jean, that I love him no longer, because I love you. I no longer go to see him ; I do not answer his letters ; but you shall never make me speak ill of the man who loved me even to folly and crime."

After this direct speaking—her best point—

Jean did not insist any longer, but he suffered from horrible jealousy, sharpened by uneasiness, which carried him back to the Rue



d'Amsterdam sometimes in the middle of the day to surprise her. "Suppose she has gone to see him!"

He always found her at home, domesticated, as inactive in this little house as an Eastern woman, or else at the piano, giving a singing lesson to their stout neighbour Madame Hettéma. They had become friendly since the evening of the fire with these good people, so pleased and plethoric, living in a perpetual draught, doors and windows all open.

Her husband, a draughtsman at the Artillery Museum, brought some work home, and every evening, and all day on Sunday, he might be seen bending over the large table on trestles, perspiring, puffing, in his shirt sleeves shaking his wristbands to cool himself, and bearded to the eyes. Near him was his fat wife, in a dressing jacket, evaporating also, although she never did anything, and to refresh themselves they sang from time to time one of their favourite duets. Intimacy had been quickly established between these two households.

In the morning about ten o'clock Hettéma would call out loudly, "Are you there, Gaussin?" and their offices being in the same direction they walked down together. Very dull, very vulgar, and some degrees lower in the social scale than his young companion, the

draughtsman spoke little ; he spluttered as if he had as much hair in his mouth as on his cheeks ; but one felt he was a good sort of



fellow, and that Jean's moral disorder had need of such contact. He continued it particularly on account of his mistress, who living

in a solitude surrounded by memories and regrets, more dangerous perhaps than the life she had voluntarily renounced, found in Madame Hettéma, ever occupied concerning her good-man, and the tasty surprise which she was planning for his dinner, or the new song which she would sing to him at dessert, a respectable and healthy associate.

Nevertheless when friendship proceeded so far as reciprocal invitations Jean had some scruples. These people believed him married ; his conscience revolted at the deception, and he directed Fanny to give her neighbour an inkling of the true state of the case, so that no misunderstanding should exist. The idea made her laugh ! Poor baby ! no one but he had such simple notions ! "They have never for one moment believed that we are married ! They make a joke of the affair. If you only knew where he got his wife from ! All that I have done the 'Saint' John has equalled. He did not marry her except for the sake of having her all to himself—and you can see that the past does not worry him much."

This was too much for him ! A former woman of the town ! That motherly, bright-eyed, woman with a childish smile on her fat,

soft face, with her drawling provincial accent, and for whom no ballads were sentimental enough, nor words too select! and he the man, so easy-going, so secure in his amorous well-being. He could see him walking at her side, pipe in mouth, emitting little sighs of content, while he himself was ever thinking and eating his heart out in his impotent anger.

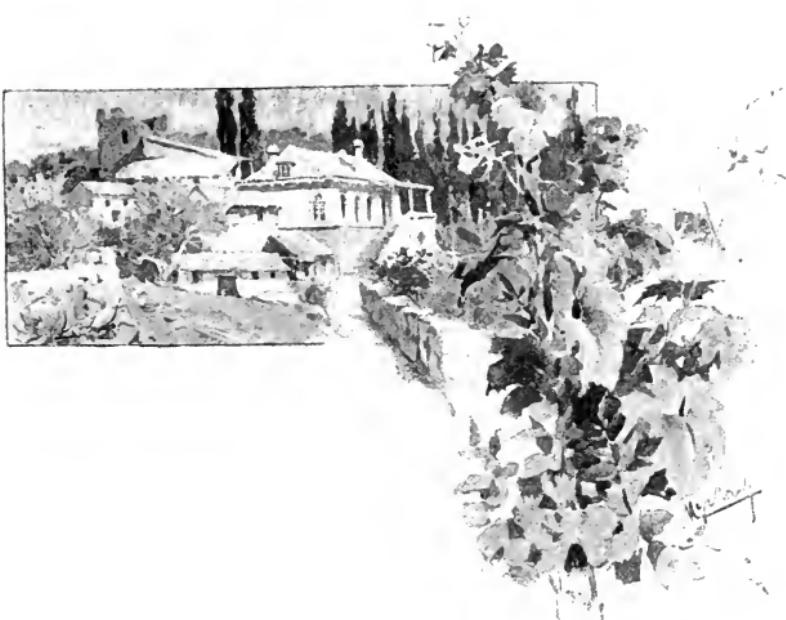
"You will live it down, my own," Fanny would say to him gently at those times at which people tell everything to each other; and she would soothe him—tender and charming as on the very first day—but with a certain *abandon* about her which Jean scarcely knew how to define.

It was greater freedom of manner and expression, a consciousness of her power, strange confidences unsought by him concerning her past life, her old debaucheries and follies. She did not deprive herself of smoking now; she rolled, and in her fingers, put down on the furniture, the eternal cigarettes which help to pass the gay woman's day; and in her conversation she let fall her views of life, the infamy of men, the treachery of women,—the most cynical theories on all subjects. Even her eyes assumed a different expression, dimmed by a film of

moisture through which a libertine laugh flashed.

And the intimacy of their affection also changed. At first restrained by the youth of her lover, of which she respected the first illusions, the woman having seen the effect on the man, of her roughly disclosed, debauched, past—did not now trouble herself to restrain the unwholesome fever with which she had infected him. So the wayward caresses long restrained, all the delirious words which her closed teeth had shut back—she let loose now, showed herself in her true colours, in all the nakedness of the amorous and practised courtesan, in all the horrible glory of Sappho!

Modesty, reserve : what good were they ? Men are all alike, hungry after vice, and corrupt practices—this youth like the others. To cram them with what they love is the only way to hold them. And all she knew, the depravities of pleasure with which she had been inoculated, she taught to Jean in turn to pass on to others. So the poison spreads, propagates itself, burning up body and soul like those torches of which the poet speaks which went from hand to hand through the stadium.



V

IN their room, beside a beautiful portrait of Fanny by James Tissot, a relic of her former splendour, there was a southern landscape all black and white, a badly executed picture by a country photographer.

A rocky eminence clothed with vines, buttressed in stone; and above, behind the rows of cypress-trees sheltering it from the north wind, perched close to a small wood of pines and myrtle stood the great white house, half farm half château, a wide flight

of steps, Italian roof, escutcheoned doors in the ruddy walls of the Provençal *mas*; perches for peacocks; cattle pens; a black bay of open sheds with shining ploughs and harrows. The ruins of old ramparts, an immense tower, standing out boldly against the cloudless sky dominated all, with a few roofs and the Roman belfrey of Châteauneuf-des-Papes, where the Gaussins of Armandy had lived "for all time."

Castelet, farm and estate, rich in vineyards, as famous as those of La Nerte and Hermiteage, was transmitted from father to son, held jointly by all the children, but looked after by the younger son in virtue of the family tradition which destined the eldest to the Consular service. Unfortunately Nature often thwarts such projects, and if ever there were a being incapable of managing an estate, or of managing anything else, it was surely Césaire Gaussin, on whom at four and twenty this responsibility devolved.

A libertine and a gambler, Césaire—or rather Le Fénat—the good-for-nothing—the scamp—to give him his youthful title—served to accentuate the contradiction in the type of individuals which appears at distant

intervals in the most austere families, and to which they serve as safety-valves.

After some years of négllect, of silly waste, of disastrous gambling at the clubs of Avignon and Orange the farm was mortgaged, the stores of wine exhausted, the crops sold in advance ; then one day on the eve of final seizure Le Fénat forged his brother's name and drew three bills on the Shanghai Consulate, assured that before they became due he would find the money to meet them ; but they reached the elder brother in due course with a desperate letter announcing the ruin and the forgeries. The Consul hurried to Châteauneuf, repaired the mischief with his own savings and his wife's fortune, and perceiving the absolute incapacity of Le Fénat, he threw up his appointment, which promised him a brilliant career, and became a simple wine-grower.

He was a true Gaussion, mad on tradition, violent and calm as the slumbering volcanoes which threaten eruption in future ; hard-working withal and a clever agriculturist. Thanks to his efforts Castelet prospered, increased by all the land up to the Rhône, and as strokes of luck never come singly, little Jean made his appearance under the

myrtles. All this time Le Fénat wandered about the house borne down by the burthen of his sins, scarcely daring to look in the face of his brother who crushed him with his contemptuous silence: he only breathed freely in the fields, or when hunting or fishing, endeavouring to get rid of his grief in the performance of ridiculous tasks, picking up the snails, cutting splendid walking-sticks of myrtle or reeds, and breakfasting alone on a few little birds which he cooked over a fire of olive-stumps on the open common. In the evening when he came in to dinner at his brother's table he never spoke, notwithstanding the indulgent smile of his sister-in-law, who felt for the poor creature, and kept him supplied with pocket-money unknown to her husband, who kept Le Fénat very close, less on account of his past follies than because of those he feared in the future: and in fact, the great evil repaired, the pride of the elder Gaussin was destined to sustain a new trial.

Three days a week there came to do sewing at Castelet a pretty fisher girl, Divonne Abrieu, born amongst the osiers on the Rhône, a true water-plant, lithe and long. Beneath the "catalane," in three pieces, which encircled her small head, the strings

thrown back so that one could admire the neck slightly sun-burnt, like the face, as far as the delicate throat and shoulders, she reminded one of some *done* of the old courts of Love formerly held all round Châteauneuf, at Courthezon, at Vacqueiras, in the ancient castles the ruins of which are dotted over the hills.

This historic memory had no weight in Césaire's love-affair, he, a simple soul without ideality or reading; but, of small stature himself, liked tall women, and was "caught" the first day. Le Fénat was quite at home in all village adventures, a quadrille in the Sunday dance, a present of game, then at the first meeting in the fields the quick attack in the lavender or in the hay. He found that Divonne did not dance, that she carried back the game to the kitchen, and firm as one of the white and flexible poplars by the river, she sent the would-be seducer rolling ten yards away. Since then she had kept him at a distance with her scissors suspended from her waist belt by a steel chain; made him madly in love, so much so that he talked of marrying her, and confided in his sister-in-law. She knowing Divonne from her infancy, that she was serious and

refined, fancied that this misalliance might be the saving of Césaire ; but the pride of the Consul revolted at the notion of a Gaussin d'Armandy marrying a peasant. "If Césaire does this I will never see him again." And he meant to keep his word !

Césaire married, and quitted Castelet to live on the banks of the Rhône in the home of his wife's parents, on a small allowance made to him by his brother which his indulgent sister-in-law brought him every month. Little Jean accompanied his mother in these visits, and was delighted with the Abrieu's hut—a kind of smoky rotunda, shaken by the north-winds or the mistral and sustained by a single upright beam like a mast. The open door gave a view of the little pier on which the nets were dried, on which shone and scintillated the bright and enamelled silver scales : beneath it lay two or three heavy boats creaking and heaving at their moorings, and the great river joyous, wide, and shimmering, tossed up by the wind against the islands which are tufted with pale green herbage. And there, when quite a child, Jean imbibed his taste for long voyages, and for the sea which he had never yet seen.

This banishment of uncle Césaire was continued for two or three years, and perhaps would never have ended had not a family



event—the birth of twins, Martha and Mary,—brought it to a termination. The mother fell ill after the double birth: Césaire and

his wife went to see her. The reconciliation of the two brothers succeeded, unexpectedly, instinctively, by the all-powerful ties of blood. The couple came to live at Castelet, and as an incurable anaemia complicated by rheumatic gout rendered the poor mother a confirmed invalid, Divonne found herself established as housekeeper; to superintend the feeding of the infants, to rule the numerous domestics, to go twice a week to see Jean at school at Avignon, without reckoning the demands made upon her by the invalid at all hours.

A woman of orderly ideas and clever, she supplied her want of knowledge by her intelligence, her shrewdness, and the remains of learning which still lingered in the brain of Le Fénat, now subdued and disciplined. The Consul trusted her with all the expenses of the house, which were felt heavily in the face of a diminishing revenue, in consequence of the failure of the vines through the phylloxera. All the district was attacked but the farm still held out, and the Consul was very much occupied in endeavouring to save it by means of experiments and investigations.

Divonne Abrieu, who remained faithful to her headdress and steel chain, and conducted

herself so modestly in her position as house-keeper and companion, preserved the house in those hard times, procured the same costly things for the invalid, brought up the little girls like ladies, paid Jean's allowance, first at Avignon, then at Aix, where he studied law ; and finally in Paris, whither he went to finish his education.

By what miracles of order and economy she arrived at such a result no one knew any more than she did. But every time that Jean thought of Castelet, or raised his eyes to the faded photograph, the first face which recurred to his memory, the first name pronounced was that of Divonne, the great-hearted peasant woman, who he felt was keeping guard at the country-house, and sustaining it by the exercise of her will. During the last few days, however, since he had become acquainted with the real character of his mistress, he had refrained from pronouncing the venerated name in her presence, as he avoided speaking of his mother and friends : even the sight of the photograph troubled him, out of place as it was on the wall above Sappho's bed.

One day when he came home to dinner,

he was surprised to see places laid for three instead of for two people: and still more astonished to find Fanny playing cards with a little man, whom he did not at first recognise, but who on turning round revealed the bright “silly goat’s” eyes, the large prominent nose, and the sunburnt and spruce face, the bald head, and the Covenanter’s beard of uncle Césaire. Hearing his nephew’s exclamation he replied, without stopping his game of cards :

“ You see I am by no means dull. I am playing bésique with my niece.”

His niece !

This to Jean, who had been carefully concealing his connection from everybody ! This familiarity displeased him, as did the remarks which Césaire made in an undertone while Fanny was getting dinner ready. “ I congratulate you, my lad. What eyes ! what arms ! a dainty for a king.” It was worse when at table Le Fénat began to chatter unreservedly concerning affairs at Castelet, and about what had brought him to Paris.

The pretext for the journey was money, some 8,000 francs which he had lent formerly to Courbebaisse, and which he had never expected to get, when a letter from a notary

apprised him of the death of Courbebaisse—by Jove! and the payment of the 8,000 francs awaiting him. “But the real motive, is your mother’s health, my poor lad. She has grown



much weaker lately, and at times her memory fails her: she forgets everything, even the names of her young children. The other evening your father was going out of her room

when she asked Divonne who that kind gentleman was who came to see her so often! No one but your aunt has yet noticed this symptom, and she only told me so that I should decide to come and consult Bouchereau concerning the poor lady whom he formerly attended."

"Have you ever had madness in your family?" inquired Fanny in the professionally grave manner which she had picked up from La Gournerie.

"Never," replied Le Fénat, adding with a malicious smile, which puckered his temples, that he had been a little headstrong in his youth, "but my madness was not displeasing to the ladies, and they never shut one up for it!"

Jean regarded them, heartsick. To the grief which the sad news caused him was added an oppressive sense of uneasiness at hearing this woman speak of his mother, of the infirmities of a critical time of life, with the freedom and experience of a matron, her elbows on the table-cloth as she rolled a cigarette; and the man talkative, indiscreet, chattered away and let out all the private affairs of the family.

Ah, the vines. . . . The vines were very bad! and the close itself would not last much longer; half the crop was already ravaged, and

the rest could only be preserved by a miracle, by tending every bunch and grape like a sick child with drugs, which were expensive. The worst was that the Consul was bent upon planting new vines which were attacked by the worm, instead of cultivating olives and capers in all this good, but now useless land, covered with dead and reddened leafy vine branches.

Fortunately he, Césaire, had some acres on the banks of the Rhône which he was treating by immersion, a splendid discovery, applicable only to low-lying lands. A good crop already encouraged him. It was a thin, not full, wine, a "Frog's Vintage" the Consul disdainfully said, but Le Fénat was obstinate also, and he was going to purchase La Piboulette with the 8,000 francs repaid by Courbebaisse's executors.

"You know it, my lad, the first island on the Rhône, below Abrieu's—but this is between ourselves, no one at Castelet must have an inkling of it yet."

"Not even Divonne, uncle?" said Fanny.

Hearing his wife's name the eyes of Le Fénat grew moist.

"Oh, Divonne! I never do anything without her. She has faith in my idea, besides, and

would be very happy if her poor Césaire should rebuild the fortunes of Castelet after having commenced their downfall.

Jean shivered: was the man going to confess; to tell the shameful history of the forgeries? But the Provençal, full of his love for Divonne, began to speak of her, of the happiness she gave him. And so pretty withal, so magnificently set up and put together.

“Ah, niece, you are a woman, you know, and should know something of the matter.”

He handed her a carte photograph which he took from his pocket-book, and which he always carried with him.

Judging from the filial tone in which Jean always spoke of his aunt, from the motherly counsel of the peasant written in a large and rather shaky hand Fanny had pictured in her mind one of the cottier-women of Seine-et-Oise, and was completely taken aback when she saw the beautiful face, with its pure lines set off by the white headdress, the elegant and lithe form of a woman of thirty-five.

“Well—yes: very pretty!” she said pressing her lips together—and speaking in a curious tone.

“And fitted to a nicety,” said the uncle, who still held to his illustrations by carpentry.

Then they went on the balcony after a hot day—of which the zinc of the verandah still retained the effects. A light rain was falling from a solitary cloud, and refreshing the air, damping the roofs, and making the pavement glisten. Paris was smiling beneath the shower, and the movements of the crowd, of the carriages, and all the consequent murmur intoxicated the provincial, stored up in his empty and giddy head the memories of his youth, and of a three months' sojourn in Paris which he had made some thirty years before with his friend Courbebaisse.

What a time we had, young people ! And their visit to the Prado one night in Mid-lent ! Courbebaisse as Chicard, and his mistress, the Mornas, as a ballad singer, a costume which brought her luck, as she has since become celebrated as a singer at café-concerts. He himself, the uncle, had under his care a little thing they called Pellicule. And quite rejuvenated he laughed all over his face, hummed dance-tunes, and seized his niece around the waist to have a few steps. At midnight when he left them to go to the hotel Cujas, the only one he knew in Paris, he sang at the top of his voice on the stairs, blew kisses to his niece who was lighting him down and called out to Jean :

"Mind you take care of yourself, you know!"

As soon as he had departed, Fanny, whose forehead was still thoughtful, passed rapidly into her dressing-room, and, through the open door of communication, while Jean was getting into bed, she said in a careless way—

"I say, that aunt of yours is very pretty, eh? I am not now surprised that you used to talk of her so much. I suppose you made poor Fénat jealous?"

He protested very angrily. Divonne! who had been a second mother to him, who when he was an infant took care of him, dressed him! She had pulled him through an illness—snatched him from death: no, never had he been tempted to commit such an infamous act as that!

"Go along with you," replied the strident voice of the woman as she held hairpins between her teeth, "you will never convince me that, with such eyes and such a figure of which that fool spoke, his Divonne has remained insensible to a good-looking fair-skinned fellow like yourself. On the banks of the Rhône or elsewhere we are all alike."

She spoke with conviction, believing all her sex perfectly ready to yield, and overcome by the first desire. He defended himself but in an awkward way, searching his memory and asking himself if ever the touch of an innocent caress had warned him of any danger whatever: and although he found nothing the frankness of his affection remained sullied, the pure cameo was scratched.

“Wait, look here, the headdress of your country.”

Upon her beautiful hair, arranged in two long plaits, she pinned a white handkerchief which bore a considerable resemblance to the catalane, the cap in three pieces worn by the girls at Châteauneuf, and standing before him in the milk-white drapery of her night-dress, her eyes glittering, she said—

“Am I like Divonne?”

Oh no, not at all: she only was like herself in that little cap which reminded him of the other, that of Saint-Lazare, which made her look so pretty, they said, while she blew her convict a farewell kiss in open court —saying, “Do not worry, my own; the happy days will come again!”

And this reflection made him so uncomfortable that, as soon as she was in bed, he

quickly put out the light, so that he might not see her any longer.

Early next morning the uncle arrived in a noisy vein, with uplifted stick, crying out, “Ho, there, you children,” with the airy and patronising intonation which Courbebaisse formerly affected when he came to seek Césaire in the arms of Pellicule. He appeared to be even more excited than he had been on the previous evening. The Hotel Cujas was responsible no doubt, and chiefly the 8,000 francs folded in his pocket-book. The money for La Piboulette of course; but surely he had the right to spend a few louis of it to give his niece a breakfast in the country!

“How about Bouchereau?” remarked his nephew, who could not remain away from office two days in succession. It was arranged that they would breakfast in the Champs-Elysées, and that the two men should go to the consultation afterwards.

That was not what Le Fénat had anticipated, the arrival at Saint-Cloud in style, a carriage stocked with champagne: but the repast was very pleasant all the same on the terrace of the restaurant, shaded as it was by acacias

and Japanese importations, which was invaded by the sounds of a morning concert at a neighbouring café. Césaire, very communicative, very polite, put on all his graces to dazzle the Parisian lady. He “pulled up” the waiters, complimented the cook, and made Fanny laugh in a foolish forced fashion, at a joke which pained Gaussion, so that an intimacy was established between uncle and niece “over his head.”

One would have said that they were friends of twenty years’ standing. Le Fénat, who became vinously sentimental about dessert time, talked of Castelet, of Divonne, and also of his little Jean : he was happy to see him with Fanny, who was a steady person, and would keep him straight ; and concerning the somewhat desponding character of the young man, and the way to manage him, he also gave her some hints, as if she were a young bride ; tapping her on the arm, his speech thick, his eyes “fishy” and watery.

He was sobered at Bouchereau’s. Two hours waiting on the first floor, in the Place Vendôme, in those immense lofty cold rooms crowded with a silent and anxious assemblage, the *inferno* of grief, of which they traversed successively all the stages, passing from room

to room, till they reached the study of the illustrious physician.

Bouchereau, having a wonderful memory, recollected Madame Gaussin very well, having gone to Castelet in consultation ten years before, when her illness commenced: he caused the details of the different phases of the malady to be related to him; re-read the old prescriptions, and immediately reassured the two men respecting the brain symptoms which had lately developed themselves, attributing them to the employment of certain drugs. And without moving, his bushy eyebrows knitted over his keen observant eyes, he wrote a long letter to the Avignon doctor, while the uncle and nephew holding their breath, listened to the scratching of the pen upon the paper, which so far as they were concerned drowned all the murmur of luxurious Paris, and suddenly there appeared to them the power of the modern physician; the highest priest, supreme confidence, and invincible superstition.

Césaire came away serious and cooled.

"I am going back to the hotel to strap my portmanteau: the air of Paris does not agree with me, d'ye see my lad?—if I remained here I would make a fool of myself

I will take the train at seven o'clock this evening. Make my excuses to my niece, will you?"

Jean was careful not to detain him. He was afraid of his puerilities and levity: and next day when he awoke, he was congratulating himself upon his uncle's safe return to Divonne, when he saw the man appear, utterly cast down, and with his clothes very much disordered.

"Good God, uncle, what has happened to you?"

Sinking into a chair speechless, motionless at first, but recovering himself by degrees, the uncle confessed to a meeting as in Courbebaisse's time: a too-plentiful dinner, the 8,000 francs lost during the night in a gaming house. Not a *sou* left! Nothing! How could he go home and tell all this to Divonne; and the purchase of La Piblouette! Suddenly seized by a sort of delirium, he covered his eyes with his hands, his thumbs thrust into his ears, and sobbing, screaming, quite unmanned, the Southerner gave way, and in remorse made a full confession of his whole life. He was a disgrace and cause of shame to his relatives; people such as he should be killed off like

wolves. Where would he be but for his brother's generosity? In the convict prison with forgers and such like.

"Uncle, uncle!" said the unfortunate Gaussin, trying to silence his relative.

But the other, wilfully blind and deaf, took a real pleasure in the public confession of his crime, relating even the smallest details of it, while Fanny listened to him with pity and admiration. A thorough-paced one; a scamp of the sort she liked; and sincerely moved, she was casting about in her mind for some means to help him. But how could she? She had seen no one for a year. Jean had no other relative. Suddenly a name came into her mind—Déchelette! He must be in Paris, and he was such a good fellow!

"But I scarcely know him," said Jean.

"I will go myself," said she.

"What! you really would?"

"Why not?"

Their eyes met, and they both understood. Déchelette has also been her lover—the lover of a night whom she scarcely remembered. But he had not forgotten any of them: they were all ranged in order in his head like the saints in the calendar.

"If it will annoy you"—she began in an

embarrassed way. Then Césaire, who while they were talking had left off screaming, turned to them, very anxiously, such a piteous look of despairing supplication that Jean resigned himself to fate and reluctantly consented, grumblingly.

How long the hour seemed to both the men, distracted by thoughts which they could not express, leaning over the balcony watching for the girl's return.

"Is it far from here—Déchelette's?"

"Why, no : Rue de Rome—close by," replied Jean furiously : he was also thinking that Fanny had been away a very long while. He attempted to console himself by recalling the engineer's words, "No to-morrow," and the contemptuous manner in which he had heard him talk about Sappho, as an old and "played out," member of the class : but his lover's pride revolted, and he could almost have wished that Déchelette would find her still pretty and winning. Ah, that old Césaire had indeed reopened all the old wounds.

At length Fanny turned the corner of the street. She came in beaming.

"It's all right : I've got the money!"

The 8,000 francs were before him ; uncle

Césaire wept for very joy, and wished to give her a receipt ; to fix the interest, and date of repayment.

“It is not necessary, uncle, I never mentioned you in the matter. He lent the money to me. You owe it to me, and you shall owe it as long as you like !”

“Such services as these, my dear, are repaid by a never-ending friendship,” said Césaire, who was transported with gratitude. And at the railway station, whither Gaussin accompanied him, to be certain this time of his departure, he repeated, with tears in his eyes, “What a woman ! What a treasure she is ! You must do your very best to make her happy, mind !”

Jean was for a long while very much annoyed at this incident, feeling his chain, already so heavy, galling him, tightening more and more ; and two things which his natural delicacy had always kept apart—his family and his intrigue, were becoming associated. After this Césaire kept Fanny informed concerning his work, his plantations, giving

her all the news of Castelet, and she would criticise the Consul's obstinacy, as regarded the vines, spoke of the health of Jean's mother, and irritated Jean by her solicitude



or her misplaced advice. But she never made any allusion to the service she had rendered on the one hand ; nor on the other, to the old escapade of Le Fénat, to that blemish upon the Armandy escutcheon which

the uncle had confessed before her. Once only did she make use of it in repartee under the following circumstances.

They were coming back from the theatre, and were getting into a cab in the rain, at a cab rank in the boulevards.

The cab, one of those old four-wheeled abominations which only ply after midnight, was a long time getting under way ; the driver was asleep and the horse was tossing up his nose-bag. While the pair were sheltering in the cab out of the rain, an old driver, who was fixing a lash on his whip, leisurely approached the window, the lash between his teeth, and said to Fanny in a cracked voice redolent of liquor,

“Good night ! How are you getting on ?”

“Hollo : is that you ?”

She started slightly, but quickly repressed the emotion ; then in a whisper to her lover she said, “My father !”

Her father ! This dirty wretch, in a long livery coat soiled with mud, the metal buttons torn off, his face blotched and soddened by alcohol ; yet in the features Gaussin fancied he could trace a vulgar resemblance to Fanny’s regular and sensual profile, and her large voluptuous eyes. Without troubling himself

about the man who accompanied his daughter, and not even appearing to see him, père Legrand told her the family news. “The old woman has been at the Necker for the last fortnight, she’s in a bad state ; go and see her one of these Thursdays—it will give her some courage. I am fortunately all right, ‘good whip, good lash.’ Business is slack, though. If you want a good coachman by the month now it will just suit my book ! No ? Well so much the worse for me. Good by for the present.”

They shook hands carelessly : the cab drove off.

“Well ! who would have believed it !” muttered Fanny—and then she began to relate to Jean a long story about her family, a topic she had always avoided—“it was so unpleasant—so vulgar !” but they knew each other better now, and need not hide anything from one another.

She had been born at the Moulin-aux-Anglais in the suburbs, of this father—an old cavalry soldier who drove the public conveyances between Paris and Chatillon—and an inn servant.

She had never known her mother, who died in child-bed, but the owners of the establish-

ment, good souls ! compelled the father to recognise his child and to pay for the nurse. He did not dare to refuse for he owed a great deal, and when Fanny was four years old, he used to take her in his carriage like a little dog, perched up under the hood, amused at being rolled along the roads, seeing the light of the lamps flitting by on each side, the backs of the horses steaming and panting, going to sleep, in the dark, in the open air and hearing the harness bells ringing.

But the father quickly tired of this *pose* of paternity ; small as the expense was he had to clothe and feed the little waif. Besides, she rather interfered with his marriage with the widow of a wealthy market-gardener, whose melon houses and cabbages he had noticed on his journeys. She had at that period the very clear idea that her father intended to lose her ; it was the drunkard's fixed idea to disembarrass himself of the child at any hazard, and if the widow herself—the kind mère Machaume had not taken the child under her protection—

“ In fact you know Machaume,” said Fanny.

“ What? that servant I saw at your house ? ”

"That was my step-mother. She was so kind to me when I was little that I took her to get her away from her brute of a husband, who after squandering all her means, beat her, and compelled her to wait upon a low girl with whom he then was living. Ah, poor Machaume, she knows what a handsome man costs. Well, when she left me notwithstanding all I could say she would go back to him, and now she is in the hospital ! How he has gone to seed without her, the old scoundrel! How dirty he is : what a rascal he looks ! He has nothing but his whip : did you see how carefully he held it ? Even when tipsy he carries it before him like a candle, locks it in his room ; and it is the only thing about him ever taken care of. Good whip, good lash : that is his motto."

She spoke of him in a careless way as if of a stranger, without disgust or shame, and Jean was horrified as he listened. That father,—that mother—compared with the stern features of the Consul and the angelic smile of Madame Gaussin. Fanny quickly perceiving all that was included in her lover's silence—all the repugnance against the social quagmire in which he was being plunged through her ;

"After all," she said philosophically, "there is something of this kind in every family: one is not responsible for it. . . . I have my father Legrand: you have your uncle Césaire."





VI

" My dear child, I write to you still agitated in consequence of the great trouble which has come upon us. The twins disappeared from Castelet for the whole of one day, the night, and morning of the day after.

" It was on Sunday at breakfast time that we missed them. I had dressed them prettily for the eight o'clock Mass to which the Consul was to take them ; then I did not think any

more about them, being detained near your mother, who was more than usually nervous, as if she had a presentiment of some misfortune. You know that she has always had such a feeling since her illness, a prevision of what is about to happen, and the less she moves about, the more active is her brain.

“Your mother was fortunately in her room, and you can picture us in the dining room waiting for the little ones. The people called them throughout the farm, the shepherd blew the great horn with which he summons the sheep, Césaire went one way and I another. Rousseline, Tardive, and the rest of us went hurrying through Castelet and each time when we met each other we said, ‘Well? We have seen nothing of them.’ At last no one dared to ask the question; with beating hearts we searched the wells, and looked under the high windows of the granary. What a day it was! and I had to go every few moments to your mother, smile calmly, and explain the absence of the little ones by saying that I had sent them to pass the Sunday at their aunt’s house at Villamuris. She seemed to believe that, but later in the evening while I was watching her, gazing through

the window at the lights which were being carried about the plain and on the banks of the Rhône by those who were searching for the children, I could hear her weeping softly in her bed, and when I asked her the reason, ‘I am crying because something is concealed from me, but which I have guessed all the same,’ she replied in that childish voice which suffering has given her ; and without either of us saying any more we resigned ourselves to our grief.

“Well, my dear child, not to dwell on this sad history, on Monday morning our little ones were brought back to us by the workmen whom your uncle employs on the island, and who had found them on a heap of vine cuttings, pallid from cold and hunger after a night in the open air in the middle of the stream, and this is what they told us in the innocence of their little hearts. For a long time the idea had possessed them to do the same as their patron saints, Martha and Mary, whose history they had read, that is, to set out in a boat without sails, oars, or provisions of any kind, to preach the Gospel on the first land to which the winds of God would waft them. So on Sunday after Mass, loosing a fishing boat, and kneeling in it like the holy women while

the current carried them down, they were gently stranded amongst the reeds of Piboulette, notwithstanding the floods at this season, the wind, the *révoluns*. Yes, the good God took care of them, and He has brought them back to us, the darlings, with only their Sunday frocks disordered and their prayer-books spoilt. It was impossible to scold them, we could only embrace them with open arms, but we have all been ill in consequence of the anxiety they caused us.

“The most affected by it is your mother, who, though we told her nothing about it, felt, as she says, death pass over Castelet, and she, usually so quiet and cheerful, still retains the sadness which nothing can remove, notwithstanding that your father, myself and everybody else attend upon her most assiduously ; and I tell you, my Jean, that it is for you above all that she languishes and distresses herself. She does not dare to confess so much before your father, who wishes you to be left to your work, but you did not come home after your examination as you promised to do. Give us this pleasure at Christmas time, so that our invalid may assume a happy smile again. If you only knew, when you have these old people with

you no longer, how you will regret not having devoted more time to them!"

Standing up by the window, through which the lazy, foggy, wintry daylight was filtering, Jean read this letter, inhaling the wild fragrance of it, and the dear remembrance of tenderness and sunshine.

"What is that? let me see it."

Fanny had just woke up in the yellow light which the drawn curtain permitted to enter, and half stupefied with sleep, mechanically extended her hand towards the packet of Maryland tobacco which was as usual by her bedside. He hesitated, knowing the jealousy which even the name of Divonne excited in his mistress, but how could he conceal the letter which she had already recognised?

At first the escapade of the little girls affected her slightly, as with arms and neck exposed she supported herself on the pillow, a cloud of brown hair about her, as she read the letter and rolled a cigarette, but the end of it irritated her to fury, and tearing up the letter, she threw it on the floor. "All this about the holy women is a lie to make you leave me, the handsome nephew is wanted by that——"

He tried to stop her, to prevent her uttering the horrible word which she launched forth and many others after it. She had never before so demeaned herself in his presence, as in this breaking forth of disgusting rage, like a sewer launching forth its slime and stench. All the slang of the street woman swelled her neck and distended her lip.

It is easy enough to see what they wanted down there. Césaire had told them, and the family were combining to break the connection, to tempt him back to the country with that Divonne as a bait.

"In the first place I tell you plainly I will write to her cuckold of a husband and tell him all about it. Ah, but——!" As she was speaking she sat up in a spiteful manner in the bed, with pale and sunken cheeks, her features swelling like a wild beast, ready to spring upon him.

And Gaussin recollected having seen her in such a state in the Rue de l'Arcade, but now this wild hatred, which almost tempted him to fall upon and beat her, was directed against him, for in these merely passionate loves, in which esteem and respect for the person are wanting, brutality comes to the

surface always, either in anger or in caresses.
He could not trust himself so he rushed away



to his office, and as he went he was indignant
with himself for the life he was leading.

This was teaching him what it was to put himself in the power of such a woman, what insults, what horrible expressions. His sisters, his mother, every one was spoken of alike. What, had he not the right to go and see his own relations? Was he shut up in prison then? And as all the past history of this connection came to his mind, he perceived how the beautiful naked arms of the Egyptian woman which had been clasped round his neck that evening at the ball, had tightened there despotically and strongly, isolating him from his friends and relatives. But now his resolution was taken; that very evening, come what might, he would start for Castelet.

Some business hurried through, his leave obtained, he returned home early, expecting a terrible scene, even a separation. But the gentle greeting which Fanny immediately bestowed on him, her swollen eyes, her cheeks bedewed with tears, scarcely left him courage to insist upon his determination.

“I leave here this evening,” he said, stiffly.

“You are right, my own, go and see your mother, and above all”—she approached caressingly—“forget how wicked I was this morning. I love you too much, that is my weakness.”

All the rest of the day while packing his portmanteau with coquettish care, assuming all the sweetness of former days, she retained her repentant attitude, in the hope of retaining him perhaps. Nevertheless she never asked him to stay: and when, at the last moment, all hope lost in view of his final preparations, she sidled up and pressed against her lover endeavouring to impregnate him with herself during his journey and during his absence, with her adieu and her kisses, only murmuring “Say, Jean, that you are not angry with me.”

Oh, how delicious to wake up in the morning in his own little room, his heart still warmed by the affectionate embraces, the congratulations of his arrival: to find himself back in the same old place beneath the mosquito curtain of his little bed, the same bar of light which he sought there when waking, hearing the cries of the peacocks on their perches; the creaking of the well windlass, the pattering of sheep’s feet; and when he had fastened his shutters open against the wall he saw the beautiful warm light which came flooding in as through a sluice, and the marvellous perspectives of sloping vineyards, cypress, and olive, and pine, losing

themselves away to the Rhône, beneath a deep, clear sky, without a trace of mist, notwithstanding the early hour—a green sky swept all night by the “Mistral,” which still filled the wide valley with its strong and invigorating breath.

Jean compared this wakening with those in Paris under a sky as foul as his love ; and he felt happy and free. He went down stairs. The white house was sleeping still, all the shutters were shut as closely as all eyes, and he felt happy at having a little time to himself to collect his ideas in the moral convalescence which he felt was commencing in him.

He advanced a few paces along the terrace, took a steep path through the park—what they called the park—a cluster of pines and myrtles growing at random on the rugged hill-side of Castelet, intersected by rough foot-paths slippery with dead fir-spikes. His dog, Miracle, now old and lame, had come from his kennel and was following silently at his heels : they had so often taken this morning ramble together.

At the entrance to the vineyards, when the great cypresses which inclosed them were nodding their pointed heads, the dog hung

back : he was quite aware how the thick sand—a new preventive against the phylloxera which the Consul was trying—would affect his old paws no less than the steep ascent. The pleasure of accompanying his master decided him nevertheless, and there were at every obstacle painful efforts, whinings, stoppings, and sprawlings like the efforts of a crab on a rock. Jean did not take any notice of him, being so much occupied in the new Alicante plant which his father had told him all about the day before. The plants seemed to be doing well in the close and glittering sand. At length the poor man seemed in a fair way to be recompensed for his trouble : the vineyards of Castelet might revive, when those of La, Nerte, Hermitage, and all the great “brands” of the South were destroyed.

A small white cap suddenly uprose before him.

Divonne ! The earliest riser, she had a pruning-knife in her hand and another thing which she threw away while her usually pale face flushed scarlet. “ You, Jean ! you did frighten me, I thought it was your father. Then recovering herself she kissed him. “ Have you slept well ? ” she asked.

"Very well, aunt ; but why were you afraid of my father being here ?"

"Why?" She picked up the vine root the had thrown away, and said,

"The Consul told you, I believe, that this time he is sure to succeed—well, look here, there is the 'beast'!"

Jean looked at the little yellowish moss incrusted on the wood, the imperceptible mouldiness which by degrees has spread through and devastated whole provinces. It was the irony of Nature, on such a splendid morning under a vivifying sun, this infinitely small, this destroying and indestructible germ.

"This is the beginning of it. In three months the whole vineyard will be destroyed, and your father will have to begin again, for he has staked his reputation on it. There will be fresh plants, fresh remedies until—!"

A gesture of despair concluded and emphasised the sentence.

"Really? Have we come to that?"

"Oh, you know what the Consul is. He never says anything about it, gives me the monthly money as usual, but I can see he is preoccupied. He runs off to Avignon, to Orange. He goes to find money!"

"And Césaire? The immersion principle?"
asked the young man in consternation.



Thank God all was going well in that direction. They had had fifty butts of light

K

wine at the last gathering, and this year they expected double the quantity. In face of this success the Consul had given over to his brother all the vines in the plain which till lately had lain fallow in rows of dead wood like a country cemetery, and now they were under water three months. . .

And proud of her husband's—the Fénat's—work the Provençale showed Jean from the high ground on which they were standing, the great ponds—*clairs*—banked up with chalk as at the salt-works.

"In two years that crop will bear; in two years also La Piboulette will also yield, and the isle of Lamotte too, which your uncle purchased without telling any one. Thus we shall be rich, but we must hold on till then, and each one must help and sacrifice himself."

She spoke gaily of sacrifice as a woman would who was not surprised by it: and in such an easy way that Jean was carried away and said "Sacrifices shall be made, Divonne."

That very day he wrote to Fanny to the effect that his parents could no longer continue his allowance, that he would be reduced to live on his official salary, and under such circumstances, their subsequent connection was

out of the question. This was severing the tie sooner than he had anticipated—three or four years—but his mistress must accept the grave reasons he gave ; she ought to pity him in his trouble, and might assist him in this painful accomplishment of a duty.

Was it such a sacrifice ? Was he not rather relieved to finish an existence which seemed to him odious and unwholesome, especially since he had returned to nature, to his family, to simple and honest affections ? His letter was written without struggle or pain, and he depended, to defend him from the reply—which he foresaw would be furious—on the honest tenderness and faithfulness of the good people who surrounded him : on the example of his father, upright and proud amid it all, on the frank smiles of the little “saints,” and also upon the wide peaceful horizon, on the healthy air of the mountains, the deep sky, the rapid river ; for while thinking of his passion, of all the vile elements of which it was composed, it seemed to him as if he were getting over some dangerous fever such as one contracts from the exhalations of marshy ground.

Five or six days passed after his great decision. Morning and evening Jean went to the post and returned empty-handed,

greatly troubled. What was she about? What had she decided, and in any case why did not she reply? He could think of nothing else. And at night, when every one had been lulled to sleep by the sighing of the wind in the corridors, he and uncle Césaire talked the matter over in his little room.

"She is as likely to come as not," the uncle said; and his anxiety was doubled by this opinion, because he had to inclose in the letter breaking off the connection two bills, at six months and a year respectively, to settle his debt and interest.

How could he honour those bills? How explain matters to Divonne? He shivered at the bare idea, and gave his nephew pain when, as they had finished their chat, he said sadly, his long nose projecting, while he shook his pipe emphatically, "Well, good night; at all events you have done the right thing."

At length the answer arrived, and at the very first lines, "My darling lad, I have not written sooner, because I wanted to prove to you otherwise than by words how well I understand and love you"—Jean stopped, surprised like a man who hears a symphony

instead of the jig he expected. He turned quickly to the last page, where he read—“remain till death your dog who loves you, whom you may beat, and who kisses you passionately.”

So she had not received his letter! But re-read carefully and with tears in his eyes, he could not doubt that it was an answer, telling him that Fanny had expected the bad news for a long while: to the distress at Castelet was owing the inevitable separation. She had immediately set about seeking for a situation so as not to be a burthen on him, and she had found the post of manager of a boarding-house in the avenue du Bois de Boulogne on behalf of a rich lady. One hundred francs a month, board and lodging, and a holiday on Sundays.

“You understand, my dear; one whole day every week to love one another, for you still wish to, do you not? You will repay me for the great effort I am making to work for the first time in my life, for this drudgery by day and night, which I accept with humiliations which you cannot picture, and which weigh very heavily against my taste for independence. But I experience an extraordinary satisfaction in suffering for love of

you. I owe you so much ; you have made me understand so many good and honest things of which no one else has ever spoken to me ! Ah, if we had only met sooner ! But you were unable to walk when I was rolling in men's arms. Not one of them, at any rate, could boast of having inspired me with a resolution like this to retain him for ever so short a time. Now, return when you please, the rooms are ready. I have collected all my belongings ; the hardest of all was to toss away the contents of drawers, and souvenirs. You will only find my portrait, which will not cost you anything, only the kind looks which I would bespeak on its behalf. Ah, my own, my own ! But if you will only keep Sunday for me, and my little place on your breast—my own place you know—" Then came affection, coaxings, voluptuous caressings, passionate words, which caused the lover to rub the satin paper against his face as if it could give him a warm human kiss.

"She does not say anything about my bills ?" asked uncle Césaire timidly.

"She sends them back to you—you may repay her when you get rich."

The uncle heaved a sigh of relief ; his

brows wrinkled with pleasure, and with a very wise gravity he exclaimed in his loud Southern accents,

“Look here, shall I tell you something ?
That woman is a saint.”

Then passing to another train of ideas by that mobility—that want of logical sequence and of memory—one of the idiosyncrasies of his nature, he exclaimed,

“And what passion too, my lad, what fire !
My mouth is dry at the very thought of it,
as when Courbebaisse read me Mornas’
letters.”

Once again Jean had to submit to the recital of the first journey to Paris, the Hotel Cujas, Pellicule, but he paid no attention to it, so he leaned out of window in the silent night bathed in the light of the full moon, so bright that the cocks were deceived by it and welcomed it as the dawn of day.

So it was true : this redemption by affection of which the poets sing : and he experienced a feeling of pride in thinking that all those illustrious men whom Fanny had loved before him, far from reforming her had rather depraved her ; while he by the simple force of his straightforwardness might draw her away from vice for ever.

He was grateful to her for having discovered this middle course, this half-rupture, by means of which she could assume new habits of work, so foreign to her indolent nature, and this old gentleman wrote next day in a paternal strain to encourage her in her reformation, expressing his uneasiness respecting the house she was managing, the people who frequented it, for he mistrusted her indulgence and the facility with which she said in resigning herself—"What do you wish? What must be, must!"

By return of post Fanny, with the docility of a little girl, gave him a picture of the boarding house, a regular family mansion inhabited by strangers. On the first floor were some Peruvians, father and mother with many children and servants: on the second floor Russians, and a wealthy Dutchman, a coral merchant. In the rooms above lodged two circus riders, "swells," Englishmen, very correct, and the most interesting little family party, Mademoiselle Minna Vogel, a zither player from Stuttgart, with her brother Leo, a poor little fellow in consumption, obliged to give up his study of the clarionette at the Conservatoire, whom his sister had come to take care of, without any other

means than those gained by a few concerts to pay for board and lodging.

“ Everything most correct and proper as you see, my dear man. As for me, I pass as a widow, and they pay me every attention. I could not admit any other conduct, your wife must be respected. When I say ‘your wife’ do not misunderstand my meaning. I am aware that you will go away some day, that I shall lose you, but after you none other ! I shall remain yours for ever, keeping the flavour of your caresses, and of the good instincts which you have aroused in me. It is very curious is it not ? Sappho virtuous ! Yes, virtuous when you will be with her no longer : but for you I remain as I was when you loved me, delirious, passionate . . . I adore you ! ”

Jean was suddenly seized with a deep wearying sadness. These returns of the prodigal son after the delights of arrival, the supper of the fatted calf and the affectionate attentions suffer always from the pleasure of a nomad existence, the bitter husks and the lazy swine.

It is a disenchantment which falls upon things and people suddenly, despoiled and discoloured. The Provençal winter mornings no longer had for him their salubrious cheerfulness, neither was there any attraction in the otter hunting along the banks, nor in wild-duck shooting in old Abrieu's decoy. Jean found the wind unpleasant, the water rough, and the strolls amongst the inundated vineyards, with the uncle to explain the system of sluices, dams and trenches, very monotonous.

The village which he had revisited at first, in his cheerful days, old houses, some abandoned, felt like the death and desolation of an Italian village. And when he went to the post-office he was obliged to submit on each door-step to the rambling utterances of the old men bent double, their arms inserted in bits of knitted stockings, of the old women with chins yellow as box-wood beneath their tight caps, their little eyes glittering and sparkling like those of the lizards on the old walls.

Everywhere he heard the same lamentations concerning the death of the vines, the failure of the madder crop, the blight in the mulberry trees, the seven plagues of Egypt

ruining this beautiful province of Provence ; and to avoid all this he would sometimes return by the steep lanes which bordered the old walls of the *enceinte* of the Popes' château, lanes deserted and encumbered with briars, with those great "Herbes de Saint Roch," a cure for skin affections, in their proper place in this corner of the middle-ages' character ; shaded by the enormous battered ruin towering above the path . . .

Then he met the curé Malassagne coming from Mass, and descending the hill with long hasty strides, his bands disordered, his cassock held up in both hands away from the briars and burrs. The priest halted, and held forth against the impiety of the peasantry, the infamy of the municipal council ; he hurled his malediction upon the fields, the cattle, and the men ; the evil-doers who would no longer go to chapel, who buried their dead without the offices of the Church, who tried to cure themselves by magnetism or spiritualism, so as to be independent of the priest and the doctor.

"Yes, Monsieur, spiritualism--that is what our peasants of Comtat have got to ; and you cannot expect but that the vines would be destroyed."

Jean, who had Fanny's letter open and clasped in his pocket, listened with an absent air, and escaped as quickly as possible from the homily of the priest and returned to Castelet to shelter himself in a crevice of the rock in what in Provence is called a "cagnard," sheltered from the wind which blows in every direction, and concentrating the sun radiating from the stone.

He chose the most remote one, the wildest, protected by briars and kermés oaks, and threw himself down to read his letter: and little by little from the delicate scent which it exhaled, the caressing words, the images conjured up, there came over him a sensual intoxication which quickened his pulses, and gave rise to a hallucination which caused the river, the bushy islands, the villages in the hollows of the Alpilles—the whole valley in which the wind swept up the dust in clouds, to disappear as useless accessories, and he was far away in their room in front of the railway station with its grey roof—a prey to those wild caresses, to the furious passions which made them clasp each other tightly with the grip of people who are drowning.

Suddenly there are footsteps on the path
clear laughter is heard, "Here he is!" His

sisters appear, with little naked legs amid the lavender, led thither by old “Miracle” who was very proud at having tracked his master, and wagging his tail in a self-satisfied way : but Jean kicked him away and declined the offers to play hide-and-seek or run races, so timidly made by the children. Nevertheless he loved these twins, who loved their brother always so far away ; he had made a child of himself for them since his arrival, amused himself in contrasting the pretty pair, born at the same time and yet so wonderfully unlike each other. One tall, dark, with curly hair, at once mystical and self-willed ; she it was who, influenced by the reading of the Curé Malassagne, had carried out her ideas of the boat ; and this little Mary had carried off her fair-haired sister Martha, who was mild and gentle like her mother and her brother.

But what an odious contrast it was—while he was cherishing the past—this innocent coaxing of the children mingling with the perfume which rose from his mistress’s letter —“No, leave me alone, I must work.” And he was returning to the house, with the intention to shut himself up there, when his father’s voice called him as he went along the passage.

"Is that you, Jean? Listen to me for a moment."

The post had brought fresh subjects of worry to this man, already gloomy by nature, still preserving the Eastern habit of silent gravity, broken by such reflections as "When I was Consul at Hong-Kong"—which burst out loudly as the crackling of a great fire.

While Jean was listening to his father reading and commenting on the morning papers, he looked towards the chimney-piece, on which was Caoudal's Sappho, her hands clasping her knee, her lyre beside her—*all the lyre* (the whole gamut) bought twenty years before when Castelet was being furnished, and this common bronze, which turned him sick in the shop-windows in Paris gave him here in his isolation an amorous feeling, a desire to kiss those shoulders, to clasp those cold and polished arms, to cry out, "Sappho, for you, but only for you."

The tempting image rose when he quitted the room, it accompanied him, echoing the sound of his footsteps on the grand staircase. The name of Sappho was in the rythm of the pendulum of the old clock, was sighed by the wind in the wide corridors—cold and paved in this estival mansion; her name he

found in every volume in the library, old volumes with red edges which still held some crumbs of his infantine luncheons. And



this oppressive recollection of his mistress pursued him even to his mother's bed-room, where Divonne was dressing the invalid's hair, brushing the lovely white locks from the face,

still peaceful and rosy notwithstanding the perpetual pain.

"Ah, here is our Jean," said his mother.

But with her neck bare, with her little cap, her sleeves put back for the convenience of performing this toilette of which she had the sole charge—his aunt recalled to his mind other awakenings, again evoking his mistress, as she leaped out of bed in the fumes of her first cigarette. He was annoyed with himself for entertaining such thoughts—in that of all places. But how could he escape them!

"Our child is changed, sister," Madame Gaussin said sadly, "what ails him?" and they put their heads together. Divonne puzzled her brains over it: she longed to question the young man, but he seemed to avoid her now and to fear being left alone with her.

On one occasion after watching him she came to surprise him in his lair in the feverish excitement of his correspondence and his bad day-dreams. He rose with an ill-tempered air. She stopped him, and seating herself by him on the warm rock she said, "So you care for me no longer! I am not now your Divonne, to whom you used to tell all your troubles!"

"But I am, I am," he stammered, confused by her affectionate manner of speaking, and turning away his eyes so that she should not see in them anything of what he had been



reading, love appeals, lost entreaties, the delirium of passion at a distance. "What is the matter, why are you sad?" murmured Divonne, with all the tender coaxings of

speech and hands, which one employs with children. He was still in a way her “little one,” he was for her only ten years old, when “little men” become independent.

As for him, still affected by his reading, he was stirred by the charms of the beautiful woman so close to him, by the luscious mouth, with lips heightened in colour by the breeze which disarranged her hair and blew it down in Parisian fashion over her forehead. And Sappho’s teaching, “All women are alike, with a man they have only one idea,” tempted him to see a challenge in the peasant’s happy smile, in her gestures a desire to detain him in tender confidences.

Suddenly he felt the rush of passion, and the effort he made to resist the temptation shook him convulsively. Divonne, alarmed at seeing him so pale, with teeth chattering, exclaimed, “Ah, poor lad, he has got fever!” With a gesture of unreflecting tenderness she took off the large kerchief which covered her bust, to put it round his neck, when she felt herself roughly seized, embraced, madly kissed on bosom and shoulders, on all the dazzling skin thus bared. She had neither time to call out nor to defend herself, perhaps she had scarcely realised what had happened—as he

fled away exclaiming “I am mad, mad !” and hurried off, the stones rattling with a sinister sound beneath his feet.

At the mid-day meal next day Jean announced his intention to depart, recalled by an order from the office. “Going already ! you say. Why, you have only just come !” And so cries and supplications beset him. But he could no longer remain with them, because amid all their tenderness was insinuated the disturbing and corrupting influence of Sappho. Besides, had not he made the greatest sacrifice in his power by no longer living with her ? The complete separation might come later, and he would then return to love and kiss without shame or embarrassment those dear ones at home.

It was night : the inmates of Castelet were asleep, and the lights out, when Césaire returned from seeing his nephew off by the train for Avignon.

When the horse had been fed, and Césaire had scrutinised the sky after the manner of

men who live by agriculture, he was going into the house, when he perceived a white figure resting on a seat in the terrace.

“Is that you Divonne?”

“Yes, I am waiting for you.”

Busy all day, separated from her Fénat whom she adored, the pair would thus meet in the evening to talk or walk together. Was it because of the short scene between her and Jean, understood—and more than she cared for as she thought about it; or because she had witnessed the silent tears of the poor mother all day? But her voice was changed, and her mind exercised to a degree very unusual with her, the calm woman of duty! “Do you know anything? Why did he leave us so suddenly?” She did not believe the excuse about the “office,” suspecting rather that some illegitimate attachment was enticing the lad from his family. So many dangers, so many fatal meetings in that dreadful Paris!

Césaire, who could conceal nothing from her, confessed that as a matter of fact there was a woman in the case, but a kind creature incapable of estranging him from his relatives, and he spoke of her devotedness, the touching letters she wrote, praising above all else the courageous resolution which she had formed

to work, which seemed only a matter of course to the peasant-woman. "For after all one must work to live!"

"Not that kind of woman," remarked Césaire.

"It was then with a good-for-nothing woman that Jean was living. And you went to see him!"

"I swear to you, Divonne, that since she has known him no woman could have been more chaste and correct. Love has reformed her!"

But Divonne did not comprehend such hair-splitting. This girl in her view was one of those whom she called "bad women," and the thought that Jean had fallen a prey to such a creature made her very angry. If the Consul only heard of it—!

Césaire tried to calm her, and assured her that at the lad's age he could not do otherwise. "*Té, pardi*: let him marry then!" she said with determination.

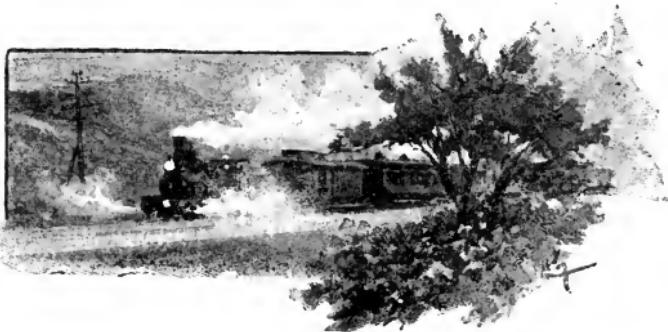
"After all they are not together now—that is something."

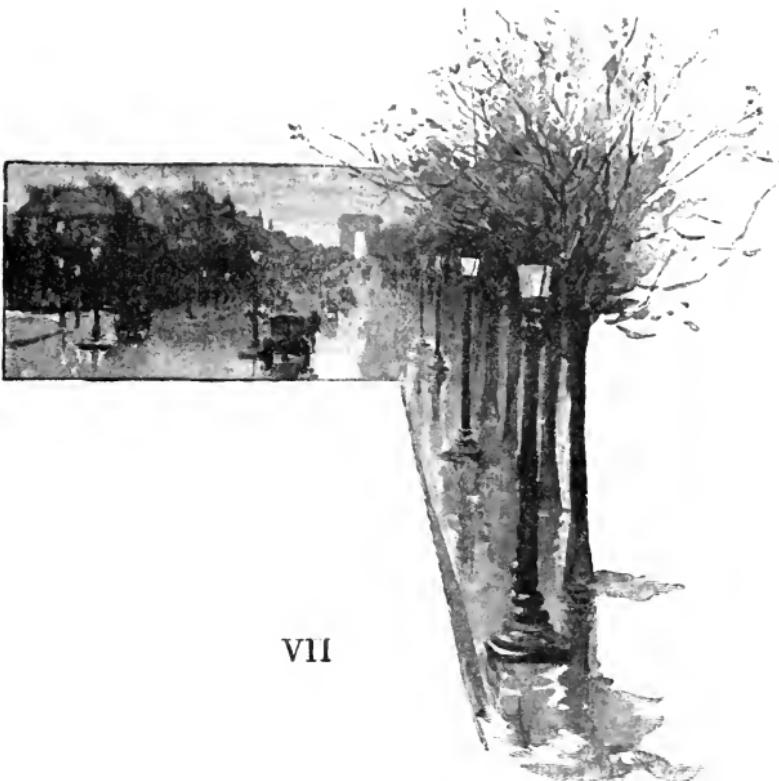
Then she said gravely, "Listen, Césaire: you know that we have a saying—'Evil lasts always longer than the author of it.' If all is true, and Jean has really lifted this woman out of the gutter, he has most likely soiled

himself in doing so. Possibly he may have made her better and more respectable, but who knows if the evil which was in her has not deeply corrupted our child?"

She returned towards the terrace. Night, clear and peaceful, lay upon the silent valley wherein naught stirred but the passing moonlight after the shadows, the rushing river, the rippling ponds like sheets of silver. One could breathe the calm, the isolation, the wonderful repose of sleep without dreams. Suddenly the up-train going at full speed rattled along the bank of the Rhône with a loud noise.

"Oh, that Paris!" said Divonne, shaking her clenched hand towards the enemy on which the Provinces vent all their anger. "Oh, Paris, what do we give you—and what do you send us back!"





VII

A COLD, foggy afternoon—dark at four o'clock even in that wide avenue in the Champs Elysées through which the carriages were rolling with a muffled sound. It was with difficulty that Jean could read from the end of a small garden, the gate of which was open, the large gilt letters above the entresol of a house which was luxurious and quiet looking as a private villa. “Furnished

Apartments, Family Boarding House." A small brougham was waiting at the gate.

Opening the door, Jean saw at once her of whom he was in search seated by the window, turning over the pages of a large account book, opposite another woman who was tall and elegantly dressed, holding her handkerchief and reticule.

"What is your pleasure, sir?" Fanny recognised him immediately, rose dumbfounded, and passing in front of the lady, said in a low voice, "It is the young fellow!" The other woman scanned Gaussin from head to foot with the coolness of a connoisseur of experience, and then said aloud, "Embrace each other, young people, I am not looking." Then she took Fanny's place and continued to check the accounts.

They held each other's hands and muttered stupid phrases, such as "How are you?" "Pretty well, thank you." "Then you started last evening." But the reserved tone of their voices gave the words their true significance. And seated on the sofa, Fanny having recovered herself a little, said, "You did not recognise my employer; but you have seen her before at

Déchelette's ball—as a Spanish bride : somewhat faded!"

"Then she is ——"

"Rosario Sanchès, Potter's woman."

This Rosario or Rosa, whose name was scratched upon all the looking-glasses of the restaurants, and always in connection with something indecent, was formerly a character in the Hippodrome, well known for her cynical brazenfacedness and her "chaff," very celebrated amongst club-men whom she managed like her horses.

A Spaniard, from Oran, she had been more handsome than pretty, and she was still attractive by gas-light by reason of her coal-black eyes and straight eyebrows : but here in the fading light she had all her fifty years marked on her flat, hard face, and its yellow wrinkled skin, like a lemon of her native land. She had been intimate with Fanny Legrand for years, had chaperoned her in her gay life, and her very name disgusted Jean.

Fanny, who understood the quivering of his arm, tried to excuse herself. To whom could she address herself to find a place? She had been in very straitened circumstances. Besides Rosa was quiet now, rich, very rich,

she was living in her mansion in the Avenue Villiers or in her villa at Enghien, receiving a few old friends, but only one lover—always the same one—her musician.

“ De Potter ? ” asked Jean, “ I thought he had married.”

“ Yes, he is married and has children, and his wife is a pretty woman too, but that does not prevent him from seeing his former mistress : and if you could hear how she talks to him, and see how she treats him ! Ah, he is bitten deeply ! ” She pressed his hand with tender reproachfulness. The “ lady ” at that moment interrupted her reading by addressing herself to the reticule which was wriggling about at the end of its cord, “ Be quiet, can’t you ! ” Then to Fanny in a tone of command she said, “ Give me a piece of sugar for Bichito—quick ! ”

Fanny rose and brought the sugar, which she held near the opening of the reticule, with a thousand endearing and infantine expressions, “ Look at the pretty darling ! ” she said to her lover, and she exhibited to him a kind of large lizard reposing in cotton wool, unsightly, mis-shapen, a chameleon, in fact, sent from Algeria to Rosa, who kept it alive all the winter by dint of much care. She

loved it more than she had ever loved any man, and Jean discerned by Fanny's attention to it the position which the horrible beast held in the house.

The woman closed the ledger and prepared for her departure. "Not bad for the second fortnight. Only mind the candles."

She threw her glance of ownership round the little room, which was neat and tidy, the furniture covered with stamped velvet—blew the dust from the yucca of a round table, called attention to a hole in the lace curtains, and then in a knowing manner said, "Remember, young people, no nonsense, this house is most respectable :" and entering her carriage at the gate she went off for her drive in the Bois.

"You can believe what a nuisance this is," said Fanny. "I have her or her mother down on me twice a week. The mother is more awful and more miserly still. I must indeed love you to put up with them! At length you have returned and I have you again : I was so afraid— She stood up and clasped him in a long embrace, lips to lips, assured by the trembling of his kiss that she was still all in all to him. But people were passing to and fro in the corridor and they were obliged

to be careful. When the lamp had been brought she sat down in her usual place, a little needle-work in her hands, he sitting close to her as if he were paying a visit.

“Am I changed, eh? Is there a little of my old self left still?”

She smiled as she showed him her crochet, which she did as awkwardly as a child. She had always hated needlework; her book, her piano, her cigarette, or with her sleeves rolled up as she made some dainty dish—she never occupied herself in other ways than these. But here what was there to do? She could not play on the piano in the drawing-room, because she was in the office all day. Read novels? She knew better tales than books could tell her. Failing the prohibited cigarette, she had taken to lace-making, which kept her hands busy, and left her leisure to think; understanding the taste which women have for these trifling occupations, which she used formerly to despise.

And while she crocheted awkwardly with attention born of inexperience, Jean kept looking at her, very quiet as she was in her plain dress and stiff collar: her hair lying close to her antique-shaped head, her

straightforward and rational demeanour. Outside in their luxurious "get up," the



fashionable ladies drove by in the direction of the noisy boulevards, and Fanny did not

appear to regret this glaring and successful phase of vice, which she might have shared, but which she disdained for his sake. If only he would consent to see her occasionally, she would accept her life of servitude willingly, and even find some interest in it.

All the boarders liked her. The ladies, foreigners, devoid of taste, consulted her concerning their dress purchases : she gave singing-lessons in the morning to the eldest of the Peruvian children, and for the book to be read, the play to see, she was consulted by the men, who treated her with great respect and attention, one of them in particular, a Dutchman, who lived on the second floor. “He seats himself there, where you are, contemplating me, until I say to him, ‘Kuyper, you bore me.’ Then he replies ‘*pien*,’ and he goes away. He gave me this coral brooch : it is worth about a hundred sous. I took it for the sake of peace and quiet.”

A waiter entered bringing a tray, which he put on a round table, moving back the green plant for the purpose. “I eat my dinner here alone—an hour before *table d'hôte*.” She pointed out two dishes in the long and full *menu*. The manageress can have only two dishes and soup. “She is a beast, that

Rosario ! But I prefer dining here, I need not talk, and I re-read your letters for company."

She stopped speaking as she sought for a tablecloth and table napkins ; and at every moment she was interrupted : to give an order, to open a cupboard, a claim to arrange. Jean perceived that he would put her out if he remained, and besides her dinner was being sent up ; so pitiful too, the little tureen holding one portion of soup smoking on the table, which made them both regret their former *tête-à-tête*.

"Till Sunday, till Sunday," she murmured as she sent him away, and as they could not kiss because of the servants and the boarders who were about, she took his hand and pressed it against her heart, so that the caress might enter there.

All that evening—all night—he thought of her suffering in her servitude under that woman and her lizard ; then the Dutchman troubled him too, and until Sunday he scarcely existed. In reality this demi-separation, which was supposed to reduce the shock of

their final separation, was for her the cut of the pruning-knife by which the worn-out tree is revived. Almost every day they sent each other tender *billets*, such as lovers indite, or else perhaps after office hours they chatted in the manageress's room during the needlework hour.

She had said at the boarding-house that he was one of her relations, and under cover of this vague term he was enabled to pass the evening in the drawing-room a thousand leagues from Paris ! He got to know the Peruvian family, with its innumerable girls dressed up gaudily, and ranged around the room like aras on perches—he listened to the zither of Mademoiselle Minna Vogel, who was wreathed like a hop-pole, and saw her brother, the consumptive invalid, nodding his head in time to the music, and running his fingers over the keys of an imaginary clarionette the only one he had permission to play. He played whist with Fanny's Dutchman, a fat, bald empty-headed man of sordid appearance, who had sailed all over the world, and when somebody asked him for some information about Australia, where he had lived several months, he replied rolling his eyes, “Guess now what potatoes cost in Melbourne !” having been

struck by one fact only—the dearness of potatoes in every country which he had visited.

Fanny was the life and soul of these assemblies; she chatted, sang, played the Parisian woman of the world; and if anything remaining in her manner of the Bohemian of the studio escaped in the presence of these “exotics” it appeared to them the height of breeding. She dazzled them by her knowledge of the people famous in literature and art, gave the Russian lady information concerning the manner in which Déjoie the novelist worked, the number of cups of coffee he drank in a night, and the exact and ridiculous sum which the publisher of *Cenderinette*, had paid him for his master-work that had made their fortune. The success of his mistress made Gaussin so proud that he forgot to be jealous, and would have passed his word on the subject if any one had doubted the fact.

While he admired her in the quiet drawing-room lighted by shaded lamps, pouring out tea, accompanying the singing of the younger girls, advising them as an elder sister, it was a curious experience to picture her to himself in very different circumstances, when she arrived at his house on Sunday morning wet and cold, and without even approaching

the fire lighted in her honour, undressing rapidly.

They did not get up until the evening. There was no attraction elsewhere, no amusement, no one to call on, not even the Hettémas, who for economy's sake were living in the country. The little *déjeuner* prepared beside them, they listened in a languid kind of way to the murmur of the streets, the whistling of the trains, the rumbling of the laden cabs, and the pattering of the rain on the zinc of the balcony, without any notion of time until darkness set in.

The gas which was being lighted glanced in pale rays upon the curtains. It was time to get up; Fanny had to be home at seven o'clock. In the semi-obscurity of the room all her worries and disgust came upon her more heavily, more cruelly, as she put on her still damp boots and her garments, her black dress, the uniform of poor women.

And by way of augmenting her regrets there were all the loved and familiar objects around her: the furniture, the little dressing room of the happier days. She had to tear herself away—"Let us go," she said; and in order to see as much of each other as they could Jean escorted her. Slowly

and arm in arm they sauntered up the avenue of the Champs Elysées, in which the two lines of gas-lamps with the Arc de Triomphe above, distant in the darkness, and two or three stars peeping out from a strip of sky, composed the foundation of a diorama. At the corner of the Rue Pergolèse, close to the pension, she put up her veil for a last kiss, and she left him disenchanted, disgusted with his apartments which he re-entered as late as possible, cursing his lot, and almost blaming those at Castelet for the sacrifice which he was imposing on himself for them.

The pair dragged on this existence for two or three months, towards the end of which it became absolutely insupportable. Jean had been obliged to cease his visits at the boarding house because the domestics chattered, and Fanny was more and more exasperated by the parsimony of the Sanchès—mother and daughter. She thought of resuming her housekeeping again, and felt that his love also had outlived his patience, but she did not like to suggest a return to him.

One Sunday in April, Fanny arrived more

smartly dressed than usual, in round hat, and a simple spring costume—she was not rich—which displayed her graceful figure to advantage.

“Get up quickly—we are going to breakfast in the country.”

“In the country !”

“Yes, at Enghien—at Rosa’s house : she has invited us : I said no at first but she insisted—Rosa never forgives a refusal. You may as well consent for my sake : I have done enough, I think.”

Rosa’s dwelling was a large cottage on the margin of the lake of Enghien, to which a large lawn descends to a small bay in which some skiffs and gondolas were lying. The chalet was wonderfully decorated and furnished. The ceilings and the mirrors in the panels reflected the shimmering of the water, and the fine elms of the park were already pushing forth their early leaves, and the lilac was in bloom. The correct liveries of the servants, the walks carefully kept, did credit to the double supervision of Rosario and old Pilar.

The company were seated at table when the pair arrived: a wrong direction having sent them astray round the lake along lanes

between high garden walls. Jean was quite put out of countenance by the cold reception he experienced from the mistress of the house,



who was furious at having been kept waiting, and by the appearance of the old hags to whom she introduced him, in her "chariot-driver's"

accents. Three “*élégantes*,” as these high-class women call themselves, three old frumps reckoned among the glories of the Second Empire, whose names were as famous as that of a great poet or a successful general—Wilkie Cob, Sombreuse, Clara Desfous.

“*Élégantes*” they certainly were, got up in the newest “mode,” in spring hues, daintily clothed like dolls from neck to boots: but so faded, worn out, made up! Sombreuse without eyelashes, her eyes expressionless, her lip distended, feeling around for her plate, her fork, her glass! Desfous, very stout and pimpled, a hot-water bottle at her feet, extending on the table-cloth her poor gouty fingers all twisted, with sparkling rings on them, as difficult to get off or on as those in a catch-puzzle. And Cob, attenuated, with a youthful figure which made her sick-clown’s head more hideous still under its tangled yellow hair. She, ruined, sold up, had tried a last cast at Monte Carlo and had returned penniless, madly in love with a good-looking croupier, who would have nothing to say to her. Rosa having received her kept her, and took great credit for so doing.

All these females knew Fanny and welcomed her with a patronising “How do you

do, little one?" The fact was that with her dress at three francs a yard, without any other ornament than Kuyper's brooch, she looked quite a recruit amongst these veterans of sin, who, amid the luxurious surroundings, the reflected light from the lake and the sky, laden with fragrance, entering through the dining-room doors, looked more ghoulish than ever.

Old Mère Pilar, the "Chinge," as she called herself in her Franco-Spanish gibberish—a regular baboon with a shrivelled pale skin, a ferocious and malicious look on her grinning face was there; her hair cut like a boy's, and gray; and over her old black satin dress she wore a great blue sailor-collar.

"And last M. Bichito," said Rosa, as she wound up the introduction of her guests by indicating to Gaussin a small heap of rose-coloured wadding on the cloth, on which the chameleon was shivering.

"Well, and won't you introduce me?" said a big fellow in tones of forced geniality; he wore gray moustaches and was well dressed, but rather stiff in the white waistcoat and stick-up collar.

"That's true; and Tatave?" said the women laughing. The mistress of the house mentioned his name carelessly.

Tatave was de Potter, the celebrated composer of *Claudia*, of *Savonarola*; and Jean, who had just had a glimpse of him at Déchelette's, was surprised to find him a man of so little geniality—a wooden mask with hard, regular features; his colourless eyes confessing to a mad incurable passion which for years had tied him hand and foot to that wretch of a woman, which caused him to neglect his wife and children, to remain as a dependant of the house in which he spent part of his large fortune, his gains from the theatre, and where he was treated worse than a servant. Rosa's bored look when he began to speak was something to see, and the contemptuous manner in which she imposed silence on him, while Pilar, following her daughter's lead, never failed to add in a most determined way—

“*Do hold your tongue, my boy.*”

Jean sat beside her, and her old jaws groaned as she masticated her food like an animal chewing the cud, and her inquisitive looks at his plate further upset the young man, already worried by Rosa's patronising air, as she joked Fanny about her musical evenings at the boarding house, and on the silly greenhorns who believed she was some

poor lady of fashion who had fallen on bad times. The old chariot-woman puffed up with unhealthy fat, uncut stones of the value of ten thousand francs in each ear, seemed to be envious of the return to youthfulness and good looks which Fanny's lover had communicated to her. But Fanny did not put herself out at all ; on the contrary, she amused every one at the table by taking off the boarders, the Peruvian who had communicated to her—as he rolled his eyes—his wish to know a "*grande coucoute* ;" the silent devotion, the puffing like a seal of the Dutchman, as he gasped behind her chair—“How much do you think potatoes cost in Batavia ?”

Gaussin did not laugh ; nor did Pilar, who was engaged in watching over the plate, or in seizing from a dish before her or from her neighbour's sleeves a fly or two, and presenting them with words of childish tenderness to the horrible little beast wrapped up on the cloth, as withered, shapeless, and as wrinkled as Desfous' fingers themselves.

Sometimes, all the flies having disappeared from her vicinity, she would jump up and capture one on the sideboard or on the glass-door. This act, repeated, annoyed her

daughter, who seemed very touchy that morning.

“Don’t get up every moment like that : it is very trying.”

In the same voice, a tone or two lower, the mother would retort,

“You are all stuffing yourselves : why shouldn’t *he* eat too ?”

“Leave the table, or keep quiet. You annoy every one.”

The old woman “gave it back” and then both of them began to “bullyrag” each other like devout Spaniards, mingling the devil and hell with gutter-language.

“Hija del demonio.”

“Cuerno de Satanás.”

“Puta !”

“Mi madre !”

Jean looked at them in supreme astonishment, while the others, accustomed to these family jars, proceeded quietly with their meal. De Potter only interfered for the sake of the stranger.

“Come now, don’t go on fighting !”

But Rosa turning to him said, “What concern is it of yours ? Are those your manners ? Can’t I speak if I like ? Go home to your wife and see whether I come there. I’ve had

quite enough of your fishy eyes and those three hairs of yours ! Take them back to your simpleton at home ! Isn't it time you did ? Eh ? ”

De Potter smiled, he was rather white. “ And one must live with *that* ! ” he muttered.

“ That is as good as *that* , ” she yelled at him, her body extended across the table—“ and you know the door is open—you can go : hop ! ”

“ Look here, Rosa, ”—begged the poor-spirited eyes. But mother Pilar chimed in with her comical carelessness. “ *Do* hold your tongue, my boy, ” and every one shouted with laughter, even Rosa, and de Potter, who kissed his still grumbling mistress, and by way of currying favour with her he caught a fly and presented it tenderly by the wings to Bichito.

And this was de Potter, the celebrated composer—the pride of the French School ! How did this woman manage to retain her influence over him, by what magic, old in vice, coarse as she was, with her mother, who was twice as infamous, and who indicated what her daughter would come to twenty years later, as if seen in a reflecting globe.

Coffee was served by the margin of the lake, in a small rustic grotto hung inside with light-coloured silks which reflected the ripples

of the water—one of those delicious nooks for love-making invented by the Counts of the eighteenth century, with a glass on the ceiling which reflected the attitudes of the old hags who reclined on the wide divan while digestion proceeded ; and Rosa, her cheeks flushed under her “make up,” held out her arms as she lay on her back crying out—

“O my Tatave : my Tatave !”

But her warmth of affection evaporated with the chartreuse, and the idea of a pull on the lake having suggested itself to one of the women, she despatched de Potter to prepare the boat.

“The small boat, you understand, not the big one.”

“Suppose I tell Désiré to—”

“Désiré is breakfasting.”

“Well, the little boat is full of water and it will take a long while to bale it out.”

“Jean will go with you, de Potter,” said Fanny, who was afraid of another scene.

Seated opposite each other, their legs apart, each one seated on a thwart of the skiff,

they baled quickly without speaking and without looking at each other, as if hypnotised by the plashing of the water discharged



by the two scoops. A large catalpa shaded with its odorous fragrance, was reflected plainly in the glittering surface of the lake.

"Have you lived with Fanny long?" asked the musician, suddenly ceasing his efforts.

"Two years," replied Gaussin, rather surprised.

"Only two years! Then what you have seen here to-day may serve as a lesson to you. Look at me! I have lived with Rosa twenty years since my return from Italy; after my three years of the *Prix de Rome*, I went to the Hippodrome one evening and saw her standing driving her little chariot above me, her whip in the air, with her barred helmet and her coat of mail, which fitted her tightly to the hips. Ah, if any one had said——!"

He re-commenced baling, and told how his relatives had at first laughed at this attachment; then, the affair becoming serious, prayers, sacrifices and all other means were employed to bring about its cessation. Two or three times the girl had yielded to bribes, but he had always rejoined her again. "Let us see what travel will do," his mother said. He travelled, came back, and went to her again. Then he permitted himself to be married: a pretty wife with money, the promise of the Institute as a wedding present. And in three months after he

left his new home for the old one. "Ah young man—young man!"

He set forth the events of his life in a dry way, without relaxing a muscle of his face, which was as rigid as his collar that held his head so stiff. And meanwhile boats full of students and girls, singing, laughing, full of fun, passed by: how many of these unconscious votaries of pleasure, might have stopped and taken a hint from this terrible revelation!

In the kiosk all this time, as if the word had been passed to separate Fanny and Jean, the old "*élégantes*" were preaching at her. "Good-looking your young man, but he has not a sou! To what can it lead?"

"But since I love him—"

Then Rosa shrugged her shoulders. "Let her do as she likes: she will let the Dutchman slip through her fingers, as I have seen her miss other good chances. After that business of Flamant, she did try to become practical, but she's now sillier than ever."

"Ay vellaca!" groaned Madame Pilar.

The Englishwoman with the clown's head interposed with the horrible intonation which had made her so long successful.

“It is very nice to love for love, little one. Love is a very fine thing, you know, but you must love money also. If I were rich now, do you think my croupier would call me ugly?” She jumped with rage, and raised her voice to a shriek—“Oh that was awful! To have been a celebrity, known all over the world like a monument or a boulevard. So well known that one had only to tell a wretched cabman to drive to Wilkie Cob’s, and there you were! To have had princes at my feet and kings, who if I expectorated said spitting was pretty—the right thing. And now that dirty wretch would have nothing to do with me because I was ‘ugly,’ and I had not money enough to pay him one evening.”

So annoyed was she at the recollection that she had been considered plain, that she tore her dress open roughly.

“The face—yes, I have lost that : but here —the bust, the shoulders, isn’t it white, isn’t it firm?”

She impudently disclosed her flesh, which remained wonderfully young-looking, after thirty years in the furnace, surmounted by a head and neck, faded and death-like.

"Ladies, the skiff is ready," cried de Potter, and the Englishwoman, fastening her dress over what remained to her of youth, murmured with a comical despair—

"Well, after all, I couldn't go about naked to all those places."

In this setting of a picture by Lancret—in which the pretty whiteness of the villas dazzled the beholder amidst the young verdure, with the terraces, the grassy slopes, surrounding the little lake, what an embarkation was this of this old lame Cytherea, the blind Sombreuse the old clown, and Desfous the paralytic, leaving in the rippling water behind the boat, the musk perfume of their "get up."

Jean took the sculls, his back bent, feeling shame-faced and disconsolate, fearful that any one should see him, and attribute to him some low share in this shameful allegorical boat. Fortunately he had opposite to him Fanny, who was seated beside de Potter, who was steering—Fanny whose smile,

had never seemed to him so young—no doubt by comparison.

“Sing us something, little one,” said Desfous, who was somewhat softened by the influence of the spring day. In her deep and expressive voice, Fanny commenced the barcarolle from *Claudia*, which the composer, moved by the memory of his first great success, accompanied, imitating with his mouth the orchestra, that undulation which gives to melody the briskness of dancing water. At that hour amid such surroundings it was delicious! Some one on a terrace hard by cried out “bravo,” and the Provençal, keeping time with his sculls, thirsted for this music from his mistress’s lips, and experienced a desire to put his mouth to the source itself, and to drink in the sun, with head held back, for ever.

Suddenly Rosa, who was furious, interrupted the song, in which this union of voices irritated her. “Here, when you have done singing in each other’s faces! I suppose you think you are amusing us, with your deadly

chaunting ! We have had enough of it ; besides it is late, and it is time Fanny returned to her desk."

And with a violent gesture she indicated the nearest landing-stage.

"Run the boat in there," she said to her lover, "they will be nearer the railway station."

This was brutal for a leave-taking, but the former chariot-rider had accustomed her people to this kind of thing and no one dared protest. The couple thrown out, at it were, on the bank, with a few words of frigid politeness addressed to the young man, and some orders given in a hissing tone to Fanny, the boat shoved off again, with cries, and disputes, which ended in an insulting burst of laughter that was carried to the ears of the lovers over the lake.

"You hear, you hear," said Fanny, pale with anger, "they are laughing at us."

And all her humiliation and troubles coming to the surface at this latest insult, she told him as they proceeded to the railway station of things which she had hitherto concealed.

Rosa was only trying to separate her from him with a view to facilitate her deception of him. "She has said all she could to make me take the Dutchman. Just now, they all set at me about it. I love you too dearly, as you know, and that puts her out with her vices, and she has vices—the most monstrous too! And all because I will not—"

She ceased, he became very pale, his lips trembled as they had trembled that evening when he was reading her letters.

"Oh, you need have no fear," she said, "your affection has cured me of all those horrors. And her dirty chameleon—they both disgust me!"

"I do not want you to remain with her any longer," said Jean, quite upset by his terrible jealousy. "There is too much dirt to eat there. You must come back and live with me, we shall manage to pull through somehow."

She had been waiting for this for a long while. Nevertheless she combated it, objecting that the housekeeping would be very hard to do on three hundred francs a month, and they would have to separate again. "And I suffered so much before, when I left our little home."

There were seats at intervals under the acacias which lined the road, and the telegraph wires overhead were covered with swallows;



and to talk more at ease the pair seated themselves, very greatly agitated, arm in arm.

"Three hundred francs a month," said

Jean. "But how do the Hettémas manage on two hundred and fifty?"

"They live at Chaville, in the country, all the year round."

"Well, can't we do the same? I am not wedded to Paris."

"Really! You really will go! ah, my own, my own!"

People were passing, a number of donkeys were carrying a wedding party homeward. So they could not embrace each other, but remained quiet, clinging close together, dreaming of the happiness to be renewed in the summer evenings which would possess this rustic sweetness, the warm stillness enlivened by the distant reports from the shooting galleries and the sound of the organs at a suburban *fête*.



VIII

THEY settled at Chaville, between the higher and the lower ground, by the margin of the old forest road, which is called the Pavé des Gardes, in an old hunting lodge at the entrance of the wood. They had three rooms scarcely larger than those in Paris, the same furniture, the cane-chair, the painted wardrobe, and to embellish the frightful green paper in the bed-room only Fanny's

portrait, for the photograph of Castelet had had its frame broken during the move, and was fading in an out-of-the-way corner.

They scarcely spoke now of poor Castelet, since uncle and niece had ceased corresponding. "A nice sort of humbug he is," she would say, as she recalled the anxiety of the Fénat to encourage the first rupture. The children only supplied their brother with news, for Divonne no longer wrote to him. Perhaps she still cherished some anger towards her nephew, or guessed that the bad woman had come back to open and comment upon her poor maternal letters written in large rustic characters.

At times they could almost have believed themselves still in the Rue d'Amsterdam, when they were aroused by the singing of the Hettémas, who were again their neighbours, and the whistling of the trains which passed and repassed continually on the other side of the road, and were visible through the branches of the trees in a large park. But instead of the dirty dark roof of the Western railway station, of the curtainless windows showing the profiles of the working clerks and the uproar of the steep street, they enjoyed the silent and green space beyond their little plot

surrounded by other gardens, and little houses amidst clumps of trees sloping to the bottom of the hill.

In the morning, before starting for Paris, Jean breakfasted in their little dining-room, the window of which opened on the wide, paved road bordered with grass and perfumed hawthorn hedges. By this road he reached the station in ten minutes, skirting the rustling and cheerful park, and when he returned this noise became hushed as the shadows from the wood were thrown upon the verdure of the road empurpled by the setting sun, and as the cries of the cuckoos from every corner of the wood were interspersed with the trills of the nightingales from the ivy-clad trees.

But as soon as they had settled down and the surprise at the quiet of their surroundings had passed away, the lover was again seized by the pangs of fruitless and morbid jealousy. The dispute about his mistress and Rosa, the departure from the boarding-house had given rise to an explanation between the two women, in which were such horrible insinuations on both sides that his suspicions and restlessness were aroused, and when he went away in the morning and saw from the train their low house and the round dormer window, his

eyes would seem to pierce through the walls as he muttered, "Who knows?" and the suspicion would haunt him even amongst the official papers in his office.

On his return, he would make her tell him all she had done during the day even to the smallest events. Of her thoughts, seldom of any consequence, which he surprised her into telling by suddenly asking, "What are you thinking of?" always afraid that she was regretting something or somebody connected with that horrible past of hers, confessed to her every time with the same unembarrassed frankness.

At any rate when they saw each other only on a Sunday, anxious for each other, he had not devoted himself to these outrageous and minute moral investigations. But now they were together with a continuity of life *à deux*, they were tortured even in their affectionate moments, agitated by a sort of dull anger by the sad consciousness of the irreparable ; he endeavouring to impart to this *blasé* woman a feeling as yet unknown to her ; she ready to make a martyr of herself to give him enjoyment such as ten others had never had, failing in so doing, and weeping in impotent rage.

Then an improvement set in ; perhaps in consequence of the satiety of sense, or more likely in the vicinity of the Hettémas. There is no doubt that of all the little households in the Parisian suburbs not one perhaps enjoyed like that one, the liberty of the country, the joy of going about in old clothes, with hats of bark, the wife without corsets, the husband almost in rags, of taking the crusts of bread from the table to the ducks, the potato skins to the rabbits, and then weeding, raking, grafting, watering.

Oh, that watering !

The Hettémas laid themselves out for it as soon as the husband came back, and had changed his office dress for a kind of Robinson Crusoe garment. After dinner they began again, and a long time after night-fall there arose from the little garden a smell of damp earth, the creaking of a pump, the clanking of great water-cans, and loud puffings amid the flower-beds could be heard, mingled with a dropping which seemed to fall from the foreheads of the workers into the roses of their watering pots. Then from time to time would be heard in triumphal tones :

“I have given thirty-two to those greedy

peas." "And I have given fourteen to the balsams."

These were the sort of people who were not content with being happy, but looked at their happiness, and tasted it in a way to make your mouth water ; the man particularly by the irresistible fashion in which he would recapitulate the delights of wintering together.

"It is nothing at all now, you'll see in December ; then one comes home muddy and wet and worried, all the weight of Paris on one's back, to find a good fire, a good lamp, a savoury soup, and under the table a pair of wooden shoes stuffed with straw. Then do you see, when one has eaten well of cabbage and sausages and a piece of Gruyère, kept fresh under a cloth, when one has emptied a bottle of liquor, which has not passed by way of Bercy, free of baptism and duty, isn't it good to draw one's armchair to the chimney corner, to light a pipe, to drink one's coffee with a thimbleful of brandy in it, and then seated opposite each other to indulge in forty winks while the hoar frost is making patterns on the windows outside ? Oh, no more than forty winks, just sufficient to enable one to get over the heaviness of

digestion. Afterwards one can draw a little, the wife clears away, completes her arrange-



ments, turns down the bed, gets the hot bottle, and when she is between the sheets, and

has warmed the place one turns in, and feels as warm as if one had crept bodily into the straw in one's wooden shoes.

He became almost eloquent on this subject, this shaggy-haired giant with a heavy jaw, who was usually so timid that he could scarcely say two words without blushing and stammering.

This foolish timidity, a comical contrast with his black beard and colossal build, had made his marriage and the tranquillity of his life. At twenty-five years of age, overflowing as he was with strength and health, Hettéma was ignorant of love and woman, when one day at Nevers, after a club dinner, his comrades dragged him, half tipsy, against his will, into a house of ill-fame. He returned again, paid the woman's debts, took her away with him, and for fear that some one would take her from him, and that he would have to begin a new conquest, finished by marrying her.

"A lawful household, my dear," Fanny said with a smile of triumph at Jean who listened in terror, "and of all those that I have known it is the most correct and respectable."

She made this statement in the sincerity

of her ignorance. The married couples into whose home life she had been permitted to enter, no doubt deserved no other judgment, and all her notions of life were as false and as sincerely expressed as this one.

These Hettémas were quiet neighbours, of equable temperament, even capable of rendering services which did not put them out very much, having a particular horror of scenes, of quarrels in which they must take one side or the other, and in general of anything that tended to disturb digestion. The woman tried to initiate Fanny into the mysteries of rearing fowls and rabbits, and in the healthy enjoyment of watering, but in vain.

Fanny, a woman of the Faubourg, who had gone through the studios, only cared for the country, its freedom or its picnics, as a place in which one can shout, roll about, and lose one's self with one's lover. She detested effort or work, and her six months of boarding-house management having exhausted her energies for a long while to come, she sank into a dormouse state, a kind of stupor resulting from good living and open air, which almost deprived her of the strength to dress herself, to do her hair, or even to open her piano.

The interior management of the house was left entirely to a charwoman, and when in the evening she summed up the incidents of the day to relate them to Jean, she could not find anything to tell him except a visit to Olympe, talks across the palings, and cigarettes, a pile of cigarettes, the ends of which covered the hearth. Six o'clock already, there was hardly time to put on a dress, to fix a flower in her corsage, and to go and meet him on the green road.

But when the autumn fogs, and rain and early twilight fell, she had more than one excuse for staying indoors, and he often surprised her on his return in one of her full white woollen dressing gowns which she had put on in the morning, and her hair put up as when he had left home. He thought her charming thus with her young and well-cared for skin, nevertheless this slipshod fashion shocked him, and alarmed him like a danger.

He himself, after a great effort to work, in order to in some measure increase their means without having recourse to Castelet, long evenings passed poring over plans, drawings of artillery, caissons, rifles on a new model which he was designing for Hettéma, felt himself overcome all at once by this

enervating influence of the country and of solitude, to which the strongest and most active are liable, and of which his early infancy, passed in a remote corner of the earth, had implanted in him the deadening seed.

And the materialism of their stout neighbours assisting, communicating itself to both in the frequent comings and goings between them, with somewhat of their moral abasement and their enormous appetite, Gaussin and his mistress began also to discuss with much interest the questions of meals, and the time of going to bed. Césaire having sent a small cask of his “frog’s wine,” they passed the whole of one Sunday in bottling it, the door of their little cellar open to the last sun of the year, a blue sky across which some rosy clouds, rosy with the tint of the heather, were floating. The day was not far distant from that of the wooden shoes filled with straw and the forty winks on each side of the fireplace. Fortunately there was a distraction in store for them.

One evening he found Fanny very much disturbed. Olympe had been telling her the history of a poor little lad who had been brought up by his grandmother at Morvan.

The father and mother were wood merchants in Paris—they no longer wrote, nor had they paid any money for him for months. The grandmother had died suddenly, and some barge people had brought back the little brat by the Yonne Canal in order to restore it to its parents but could not find them. The yard was closed, the mother had run away with a lover, the drunken father being bankrupt had disappeared. These lawful unions were so happy! There was the poor little fellow six years old, quite “a love” without bread or clothing, a castaway.

She was moved even to tears, and then said suddenly:

“Suppose we offer to take it, would you consent?”

“What nonsense!”

“Why?” Then coming close to him, coaxing him she continued: “You know how I wished to have a child, we could bring this one up and educate him. People love these little ones that they adopt quite as much as their own.”

She pictured also the occupation which such a one would give her left alone all day as she was, a prey to unpleasant thoughts. A child is such a safeguard. Then seeing him

alarmed at the idea of the cost she said, "Oh, the expense is nothing." Why, just think, at six years old we can fit him out with your old things. Olympe, who understands all about it, assures me it would make no difference at all."

"Let her take him then," said Jean, with the ill humour of a man who feels himself conquered by his own want of will. He endeavoured nevertheless to resist, calling to his aid the decisive argument, "And when I am no longer here, what then?" He seldom spoke of their separation, so as not to distress Fanny, but he thought of it, by way of fortifying himself against the dangers of housekeeping and the melancholy confidences of de Potter.

"What a complication this child would make, and what a burden he will be to you in the future."

Fanny's eyes grew dim.

"You are quite mistaken, my own; the child would be something to talk to about you; a comfort, a responsibility too, which would give me strength to work and some pleasure in life again."

He reflected for a minute, picturing her all alone in the empty house.



"Where is this child?"

"At Bas-Meudon, at the house of a barge-man, who has kept him for some days. After that there is nothing but the workhouse."

"Well, then, you can go and fetch him, as you seem to be bent on it."

She clasped him round the neck, and was childishly happy all the evening; playing, singing, in high spirits, happy as if transfigured. Next day in the train Jean mentioned their determination to the stout Hettéma, who seemed posted up in the business, but not desirous of interfering. Settled comfortably in his corner, and deeply engaged in the perusal of the *Petit Journal*, he stammered from beneath his beard:

"Yes, I know; this is the women's affair. It does not concern me." Then looking over his paper, he said: "Your wife seems to be very romantic."

Romantic or not, she was very much dismayed in the evening as she knelt, a plate of soup in her hand, endeavouring to bring to reason the little Morvandian lad, who, standing upright in a resentful attitude hanging his head—an enormous head, with hair like hemp—obstinately refused to speak, to eat, or even to show his face, but kept

repeating in a monotonous and choking voice :

“ Want to see Ménine—see Ménine ! ”



“ Ménine, that’s his grandmother, I think. I have not been able to get anything else out of him for two hours.”

Jean also tried to make him swallow the soup, but unsuccessfully. And there they remained, both of them, kneeling in front of him, one holding the plate, and the other the spoon, as if he were a sick lamb, repeating encouraging and tender words, in the hope of reassuring him.

"Let us go to dinner ; perhaps we frighten him. He will eat if we don't take any notice of him."

But he continued to stand there immovable, dumbfounded ; repeating his little plaint of "Want to see Ménine," which moved them to the heart, until he went to sleep, standing upright by the sideboard, and so soundly that they were enabled to undress him and put him to bed in a heavy country cot, which had been borrowed of a neighbour, without his opening his eyes for a second.

"Look how pretty he is," exclaimed Fanny, who was very proud of her new acquisition ; and she forced Gaussin to admire the firm forehead, the refined and delicate features, notwithstanding the peasant tint, that perfection of shape, the stout arms, the legs of a little faun, long and sinewy, already covered with downy hair. She quite forgot herself while contemplating this infantine beauty.

"Cover him now, or he will be cold," said Jean, whose voice made her start as if from a dream, and while she tucked him up tenderly, the lad heaved long, sobbing sighs, a murmur of despair, notwithstanding that he slept.

In the night he began to talk to himself, "Guerlaude me Ménine."

"What does he say? Listen."

He wanted to be guerlaudé, whatever that signified in his *patois*. Jean at a venture extended his arm, and began to rock the heavy cot. By degrees the lad became quieter, and went to sleep again, holding in his little fat and dimpled fist, the hand which he fancied belonged to his Ménine, who had died a fortnight before.

He was like a wild cat in the house, which scratched and bit, eating its meals alone, with growlings when any one came near his trencher. The few words which they could get him to speak were in the barbarous tongue of the Morvandian wood-cutters, which no one could have understood without the assistance of the Hettémas, who came from the same district. However, by dint of care and gentleness, they managed to tame him a little, "un pso," as he would have said.

He consented to change his ragged garments for warm, clean clothes, the sight of which made him first yell with rage, as if he were a jackal being clothed in a greyhound's coat. He learned to eat at table, to use his fork and spoon, and to reply when they asked his name that in his own country, "i li dision Josaph."

As for giving him the least ideas of the most elementary education it was not to be thought of yet. Brought up in the depths of a wood, in a charcoal burner's hut, the murmur of a rustling and swarming nature surged through his brain like the noise of the sea in a shell ; and there were no means of getting anything else into his head. Neither could they keep him in the house, even in the most severe weather.

In the rain and snow, when the leafless trees stood out like frosted coral branches, he would escape, range through the bushes, and explore the rabbit burrows with the clever cruelty of a ferret ; and when he came home again, faint with hunger, he always carried with him in his ragged fustian vest, or in the pocket of his little trousers, begrimed with mud to the waist, some dead or stupefied animal—a bird, a mole, or a field-

mouse—or, in default, some beetroot or potatoes, which he had dug up in the fields.

Nothing could overcome this poaching and plundering instinct, which was complicated by a stupid mania for hiding all kinds of glittering objects, such as brass buttons, jet beads, and tin-foil, which Josaph would seize and carry off to his magpie-like hiding-places. All this plunder he designated vaguely as food, and neither reasoning nor beating could prevent him from getting this food at the expense of everything and everybody.

Only the Hettémas could keep him in order, for the draughtsman kept within reach of his hand on the table around which the young savage would prowl, attracted by the compasses and coloured pencils, a dog-whip, with which he flipped the lad's legs. But neither Jean nor Fanny would have used such means, although the lad showed himself towards them sullen and defiant, unappeasable even by tenderness, as if his Ménine when dying had deprived him of all demonstration of affection. Fanny, "because she smelt nice," succeeded now and then in keeping him on her knees for a while, while towards Gaussin, who was nevertheless very

gentle with him, he was always the same wild animal, with defiant look and extended claws, as he had been at first.

This invincible and almost instinctive repulsion of the child, the curious malice of his little blue eyes with white lashes, and above all the blind and sudden tenderness of Fanny for this strange lad who had tumbled so suddenly into their life, aroused anew the suspicions of her lover. It was perhaps a child of hers brought up by a nurse or at her stepmother's house, and the death of Machaume, which they heard of about this time, seemed a coincidence that justified his suspicions. Sometimes during the night when he was holding the little hand clasped in his own—for the child in his sleep believed always he was holding Ménine—he would ask, “Where do you come from? who are you?” hoping to divine by the communication of heat with the little being, the mystery of his birth.

But his uneasiness disappeared at a word from Père Legrand, who came to ask them to help pay for his wife's funeral, and who called out to his daughter when he saw Josaph's cot,

“Hullo! a young 'un! you ought to be

happy now. You who could never manage to get one."

Gaussin was so delighted, that he paid the expenses of the funeral without asking to see the bill, and made old Legrand stay to breakfast.

Employed on the tramway between Paris and Versailles, full of wine and apoplexy but always lusty and looking respectable under his hat of polished leather, with his heavy band of crape which made it a regular mute's hat, the old coachman appeared delighted with the reception accorded him by his daughter's young man, and from time to time he came to take a snack with him. His white pantaloons' hair falling over his shaven and blotched face, his tipsy haughtiness, the respect which he bore his whip, attitudinising with it, placing it carefully in a corner as a nurse would a child, all this impressed the little lad very much, and they got great friends. One day when they were all finishing dinner the Hettémas came in unexpectedly.

"Ah ! I beg your pardon," said madame, "a family party I see," and the words struck Jean, in the face as it were, as humiliating as a blow.

His family ! This foundling, who was rubbing his head on the tablecloth, that old

ruffian, his pipe in the corner of his mouth, explaining in his hoarse voice for the hundredth time that two pennyworth of whip-cord lasted him six months, and he had not changed his whip-handle for twenty years. His family indeed ! no more than his wife was that Fanny Legrand who was getting old and worn out, and now leaning on her elbows amid the smoke of her cigarettes. Before another year was out, all this would have disappeared from his life just as do the acquaintances one meets when travelling, and at the *table d'hôte*.

But at other times the idea of separation which he invoked as an excuse for his weakness when he felt himself drawn downwards and sinking, this idea, instead of reassuring and solacing him, made him feel the numerous chains that were closing around him. What an uprooting this departure would be ! Not one separation but ten ; and what would it cost him to let fall the child's little hand which was at night inclosed in his own ? Even to La Balue, the *oriole*, whistling and singing in his cage that was always going to be changed as it was too small for him, and in which his back was bent like the old Cardinal in his iron prison—yes, La Balue himself

occupied a little corner of his heart, and it would be painful to pluck him away from it.

This inevitable separation was approaching nevertheless, and the glorious month of June, when all nature was so gay, would probably be the last which they would ever pass together. Was it this that made her nervous and irritable, or was it the education of Josaph, undertaken with sudden ardour, to the great annoyance of the little Morvandian, who would remain for hours over his letters without looking at them or pronouncing them, his face as firmly set as the bars of a farmyard door? From day to day this woman's character developed itself in violence, and in tears, in scenes continually renewed, although Gaussin made every allowance for her; but she was so insulting, and there rose from her anger such spitefulness and hatred against the youth of her lover, against his education, his family, the separation which life would increase between them; she understood so well how to touch him on his tenderest points that he ended by losing control of himself and answering her in return.

Only in his anger he maintained a reserve; the compassion of a man well brought up; blows which he would not inflict as being too

severe and to the point, while she launched forth in all the rage of a common girl without responsibility or modesty, making a weapon of everything, and spying out on the face of her victim with a cruel joy the suffering she inflicted ; then all at once falling into his arms and imploring his pardon.

The countenances of the Hettémas, witnesses of these quarrels, which almost always broke forth at table at the moment they sat down, and when the soup was uncovered, or the meat being carved, was a picture. They exchanged a look of comic terror across the table. Would they be able to dine, or would the leg of mutton go flying into the garden, with the dish, the gravy, and the haricot stew ?

“ Now mind, no disturbance,” they would say, each time there was a question of taking a meal together ; and it was with this understanding that they accepted an invitation to breakfast together in the forest, which Fanny had given them one Sunday over the wall. Oh no ! there would be no disputing that day, it was too fine. And she ran off to dress the child and to pack the basket.

They were all ready and about to start when the postman brought a registered letter,

and kept Gaussin back to sign the receipt. He rejoined the party at the entrance of the wood, and said to Fanny in an undertone :

“It is from uncle ; he is delighted. A splendid crop sold on the spot. He sends back the eight thousand francs you borrowed from Déchelette, with many compliments and thanks to his niece.”

“Yes ; his niece in the Gascon style. The old fool ! Let him be,” said Fanny, who did not preserve any feelings for uncles from the south ; then in a joyful tone she added :

“We must invest this money.”

He looked at her in astonishment, having always known her to be very scrupulous in money matters.

“Invest it : but it is not yours !”

“Well, the fact is, I never told you—” She blushed with that look that bore witness to the slightest deviation from the truth. That good fellow Déchelette having learnt what they were doing for Josaph, had written to her to say that the money would assist them to bring up the lad. “But if that annoys you, you know, you can send the eight thousand francs back to him. He is in Paris.”

The voices of the Hettémas, who discreetly had gone on in front, resounded under the trees.

“To the right or the left?”

“To the right; to the right—towards the ponds,” cried Fanny; then to her lover she said, “Look here, you are not going to give way to your absurd suspicions again; we have kept house too long for that.”

She knew very well the significance of that trembling pallor of the lips, that glance at the child taking him in from head to foot; but this time there was a very small eruption of jealous violence. By this time he had become cowardly from habit, and made concessions for the sake of peace. “What is the use of my torturing myself to get to the bottom of things? If this child is hers, what more natural than she should keep it, hiding the truth from me, after all the scenes and questions to which I have made her submit? Is it not better to accept the fact, and to pass the few months that remain to us in peace?”

And so he went along the undulating paths through the wood, carrying their breakfast in the heavy basket, covered with a white cloth, resigned, weary, his back bent like an old

gardener ; while before him walked the mother and the child, Josaph very awkward in a Sunday suit, purchased ready made at La Belle Jardinière—a suit which prevented him from running about ; she attired in a bright-coloured, loose-fitting gown, her head and neck bare, beneath a Japanese umbrella ; her form somewhat stout, her walk languid, and in her beautiful wavy hair a large gray lock, which she no longer took the trouble to hide.

In front and below them the Hettémas had disappeared down the sloping path, wearing immense straw hats, like those of the Touareg horsemen, clothed in red flannel and laden with eatables, fishing tackle, nets, &c., and the wife, to save her husband, was bravely carrying across her chest the enormous hunting-horn, without which the draughtsman found it impossible to go into the forest. As they proceeded the pair sang :

“ J'aime entendre la rame
Le soir battre les flots ;
J'aime le cerf qui brame.”

The repertory of Olympe was inexhaustible as regarded these common sentimental ditties, and when one pictures to oneself how she

had collected them, in what shameful half lights, to how many men she had sung them, the serenity of the husband accompanying her seemed most extraordinary. The remark of the grenadier at Waterloo: “Ils sont trop—” must have been that of the philosophical indifference of this man.

While Gaussin, in an abstracted manner, was watching the stout couple plunging into the valley which he himself was entering in their tracks, the grinding of wheels ascending the walk with a peal of childish laughter, of infantine voices were heard, and suddenly there appeared, a few paces from him, a number of young girls, their ribbons and hair waving in the breeze, seated in a donkey chaise, which a young girl, scarcely older than her companions, was guiding along the rough road.

It was easy to see that Jean made one of the party whose curious appearance—particularly that of the stout woman girt with the hunting-horn—had awakened the undisguised merriment of the young people, so the young girl tried to silence them for a moment. But this new Touareg had let loose their merriment louder than ever, and when passing before the man who stood aside to let the

chaise pass, a pretty and somewhat embarrassed smile begged pardon, and naïvely



expressed itself astonished to find the old gardener had so pleasant and so young a face.

He raised his hat timidly and blushed with shame, he knew not why, and the chaise stopping at the top of the slope at the cross roads while a chorus of little voices read on the finger-post the half-obliterated names *Route des Étangs*, *Chêne du grand Veneur*, *Fausses Reposes*, *Chemin de Vélizy*, Jean turned round to see disappear in the green alley spangled with the sunlight, and carpeted with moss on which the wheels ran as upon velvet, this whirlwind of fair youth, this chaise-load of happiness in spring garb, in the midst of peals of laughter which echoed through the branches.

Hettéma's horn furiously blown aroused him suddenly from his reverie. The party were seated on the border of the pond, and were busy unpacking the baskets, and from a distance the white cloth on the level grass, and the jackets of red flannel glaring amid the greenery like huntsmen's coats, could be seen reflected in the clear water.

“ Now make haste, you have got the lobster, cried the stout man ; then came the sharp voice of Fanny.

“ Was it the little Bouchereau who stopped you on the road ? ”

Jean started at the name of Bouchereau

which carried him back to Castelet to the bed-side of his sick mother.

“Yes indeed,” said the draughtsman, taking the basket out of his hands, “the tall girl who was leading the chaise is the Doctor’s niece, his brother’s daughter, whom they have taken to live with them. They stay at Vélyz during the summer—she is pretty?”

“Oh, pretty? Impudent-looking rather,” and Fanny, who was cutting the bread, looked sharply at her lover, feeling uneasy at his absent expression.

Madame Hettéma, very grave, unpacking the ham, began to blame very much this fashion of allowing young ladies to roam through the woods at will. “You may tell me that it is the English custom, and that the girl was brought up in London, but all the same it is not conventional.”

“No, but very convenient for adventures.”

“Oh, Fanny!”

“I beg your pardon; I was forgetting. Monsieur believes in innocent girls.”

“Well, let us have our lunch,” said Hettéma, who was getting alarmed. But Fanny found it necessary to state all that she knew about young ladies of fashion. She had some nice stories about them—the convents, the boarding-

schools, all so very proper ! Girls left them *blasé* and exhausted, with a distaste for men's society, and so on. " And then they are given to you, you set of simpletons—an innocent girl ! as if there were any innocent girls—as if, fashionable or not fashionable, all girls did not know from their birth how certain things happen. As far as I am concerned, when I was twelve years old I had nothing more to learn, nor you either, Olympe, eh ? "

" Naturally," said Madame Hettéma, with a shrug of her shoulders, but the fate of the breakfast made her anxious, especially when she heard Gaussin, who was losing his temper, declare that there were young girls and young girls, and that one could find still in families—

" Ah, ah, yes, in families," retorted his mistress in a contemptuous air, " let us talk of them, of yours especially."

" Hold your tongue ; I forbid you to—" "

" Bumpkin ! "

" Hussy ! Fortunately this will soon end. I have not long to live with you."

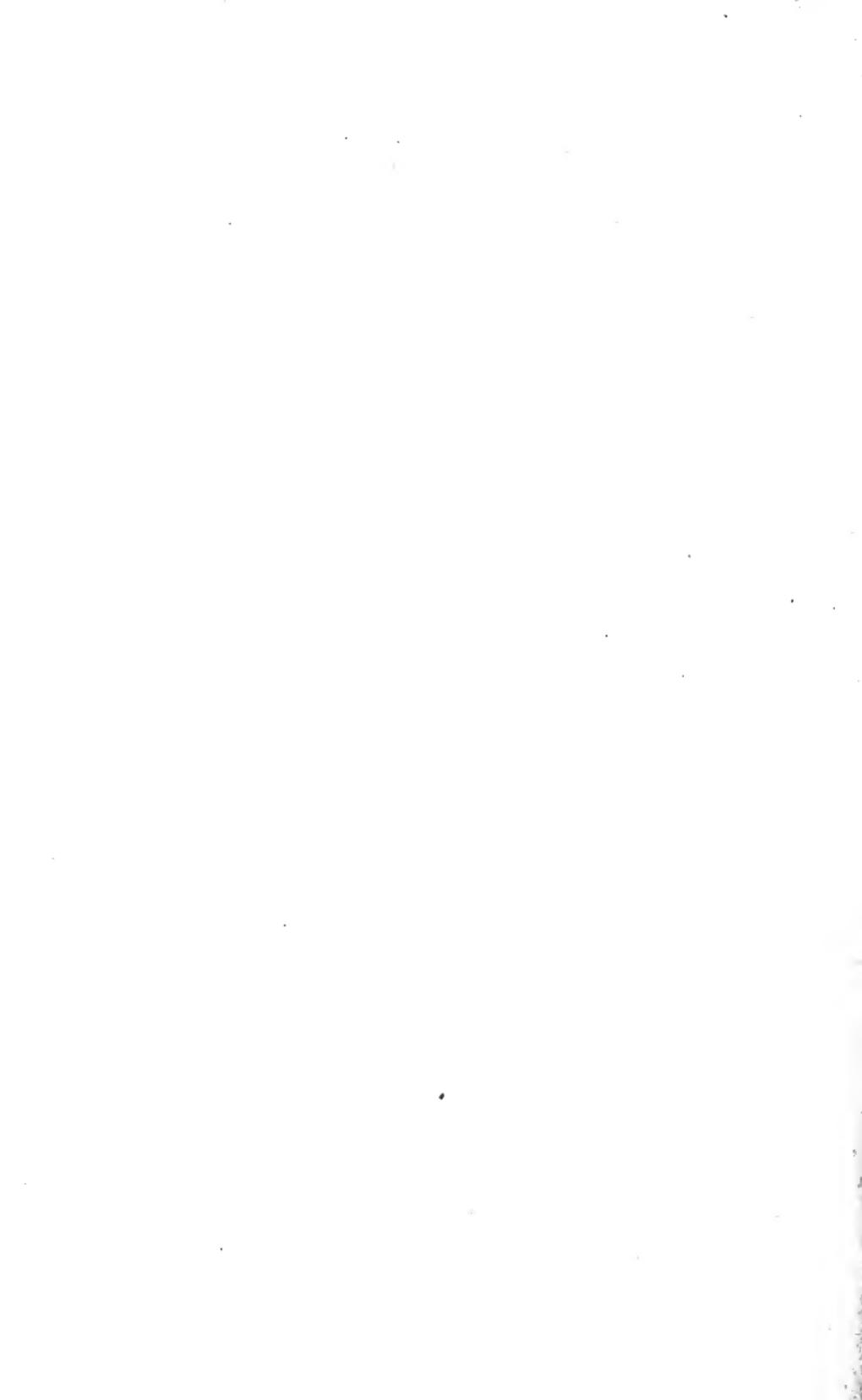
" Go, get out. I shall be delighted."

They were openly insulting each other thus before the child who was lying flat upon the grass, when a fearful trumpet blast, echoed a

hundredfold by the pond in the sloping wood,
suddenly overcame their quarrel.

"Have you had enough? Would you like
some more?" And the fat Hettéma, with red
face and swollen neck, having only this means
of silencing the pair, waited with the mouth-
piece to his lips and the bell of the horn
threatening them.







IX

As a rule their disputes did not last long, dispersed by a little music or by Fanny's coaxing, but on this occasion he was seriously annoyed with her, and for many days afterwards he preserved the same gloomy exterior, and the same offended silence, seating himself at his drawing immediately after meals, and refusing to go out with her at all.

A sudden feeling of shame came upon him at the degradation in which he was living, the fear of meeting again the little chaise coming up the path, and the pure youthful smile which constantly recurred to him. Then with the indistinctness of a departing dream, of a changing scene in a fairy extravaganza, the apparition became indistinct, lost itself in the wooded distance, and Jean saw it no more. Only the feeling of sadness remained, and of which Fanny, believing she knew the cause, resolved to ascertain the truth.

“It is done,” she said to him joyfully one day. “I have seen Déchelette, and have paid him the money. He agrees with you that it is better thus, though I want to know why. However, it is done. Later on, when I am alone, he will consider the child. Are you satisfied? Are you still angry with me?”

And she told him of her visit to the Rue de Rome; her astonishment at finding there instead of the noisy house full of delirious acquaintances, a most respectable, peaceful mansion, most strictly guarded. No more galas, no more masked balls; and the explanation of the change was to be found in these

words, chalked on the gate leading to the studio by some parasite, angry at being refused admission : "Fermé pour cause de collage."

"And this is the truth, my dear. Déchelette, on his arrival, was smitten by Alice Doré, a girl at the skating rink, and has been keeping her there for a month—a very nice, gentle little woman, a pretty lamb. They scarcely make a sound between them. I promised that we would go and see them; it will be a little change for us from the hunting horn and the ballads. Philosophy, with its theories, it's all one. No to-morrow, no entanglement. Ah! didn't I tease him!"

Jean allowed her to take him to Déchelette's house. He had not met the owner since their conversation by the Madeleine. He would have been very much surprised if any one had told him that he would come down to meet, without disgust, this cynical and disdainful lover of his mistress, and become almost his friend. At his very first visit he was astonished to find himself so much at his ease; charmed by the gentleness of this man with his childish laugh, in his Cossack's beard, and with a serenity of

temperament which not even his bilious attacks, which turned his face and eyes to a leaden colour, could alter.

And how well they understood the affection which he inspired in this Alice Doré—a girl with long, soft, white hands, of insignificant, fair beauty, which set off the brilliancy of her Flemish skin, as golden as her name. There was gold in her hair, in her eyes, in her eyelids, gilding the skin even under her nails.

Picked up by Déchelette from the asphalte of the skating-rink, amidst the gross and brutal remarks and the clouds of smoke of the libertine crowd, his politeness had touched and surprised her. She felt herself a woman again, no longer the poor waif and stray she had been, and when he was about to dismiss her next day, she pleaded so sweetly, so humbly, “let me stay longer,” that he did not have the courage to refuse her. Since then, half from humane respect, half from laziness, he kept his door closed on this accidental honeymoon, which he passed in the freshness and calm of his summer palace, so well arranged for comfort ; and they lived thus very happily—she the object of a tender care which she had never hitherto known, he

in the happiness which he was conferring upon this poor creature, and in her naïve



gratitude ; also being influenced without understanding how, and for the first time, by the

insinuating charm of a woman's intimate society, the mysterious magic of an existence together, in a union of goodness and sweetness.

For Gaussin the studio in the Rue de Rome was a diversion from the low, mean level in which his life was passing like that of a small clerk in similar circumstances. He liked the conversation of this clever man of artistic tastes, of this philosopher in the Persian robe as light and loose as his teaching, those recitals of his travels, which Déchelette sketched in the fewest possible words, were quite in keeping amongst the oriental hangings, the gilt Buddhas, the bronze monsters, the exotic luxury of that immense hall, to which the daylight entered through a lofty glazed roof, the true light of wooded depths, agitated by the graceful foliage of the bamboos, the serrated, palm-like leaves of the tree ferns, and the enormous leaves of the stillingias, mingled with philodendrons, as thin and flexible as water plants, seeking shade and humidity.

On Sunday particularly, in the large bay window looking upon the summer-deserted streets of Paris, the rustling of the leaves, the smell of the fresh earth around the plants,

it seemed to be almost as much the country and the wood as at Chaville, less the promiscuousness and the horn of the Hettémas. No people ever came there. On one occasion, however, Gaussin and his mistress coming to dinner, heard in the hall the sound of animated voices. Day was closing, people were drinking *raki* in the conservatory, and the discussion seemed to be lively.

"And I think that five years of Mazas, a lost name, life ruined, is paying dearly enough for one act of passion and folly. I will sign your petition, Déchelette."

"It is Caoudal," said Fanny in a whisper tremblingly.

Some one replied with the dry snappishness of a refusal. "For my part I sign nothing, accepting no liability with the fellow."

"La Gournerie now." And Fanny, pressing against her lover murmured, "Let us go if it will annoy you to see them."

"Why so? Not at all." In fact he scarcely could realise what he would feel when he found himself face to face with these men, but he did not wish to shrink from the test, desirous perhaps to know the actual degree of the jealousy which had been the cause of his miserable love.

"Come along," he said, and they presented themselves in the rosy light of declining day which illuminated the bald heads and the grizzly beards of Déchelette's friends, reclining on low divans round an oriental table, on which was trembling in five or six glasses the aniseed-flavoured and milky liquid which Alice was dispensing. The women embraced each other. "You know these gentlemen, Gaussion?" asked Déchelette, with a lazy wave of his hand from his rocking-chair.

Did he know them? Two of them at least were familiar to him in consequence of his having studied their portraits for hours in the shop windows. How they had made him suffer! how he had hated them with a successor's hatred, a raging desire to spring upon them and to gnaw their faces when he met them in the street. But Fanny had truly said that the feeling would pass away; now they were to him as faces of acquaintances, almost of relatives; uncles from a distance whom he met again.

"Good-looking as ever, young fellow," said Caoudal, stretched at all his giant length and holding a screen above his eyes to shade them, "and Fanny, let me see," he raised himself on his elbow and examined her critically. "The

face has lasted, but the figure ! You must lace tighter ; after all you may console yourself, my girl, La Gournerie is even fatter than you are."

The poet curled his thin lips disdainfully, seated cross-legged on a pile of cushions—since his journey to Algeria he pretended he could sit no other way—fat and pasty-looking, having no intelligence in his appearance, with the exception of his massive forehead beneath a forest of white hair, and his sharp overseer's glance ; he affected a fashionable reserve, an exaggerated politeness towards Fanny, as if to read Caoudal a lesson.

Two landscape painters, with bronzed and rustic faces, completed the party. They also knew Jean's mistress, and the younger of the two as he shook her hand said :

" Déchelette has told us the history of the child, it is very nice of you to behave so, my dear."

" Yes," said Caoudal to Gaussin. " Yes ; very smart indeed that adoption. Nothing at all provincial about it."

She seemed embarrassed by this praise, when some one knocked against a piece of furniture in the darkened studio, and a voice asked, " Who's there ? "

Déchelette said, "It is Ezano."

Jean had never seen him, but he knew what place this Bohemian, this fanciful fellow, now married, a leader in the *Beaux Arts*, had held in Fanny's existence, and he remembered a packet of passionate and charmingly-written letters. A little sunken-faced, shrivelled man came forward, stiffly giving his hand at arm's length, keeping people at a distance by his platform manner and administrative style. He appeared very much surprised to see Fanny, and particularly to find her looking so pretty after such a lapse of time.

"Why, Sappho!" and a faint blush tinged his cheeks.

This name of Sappho, which recalled the past, and reminded her of all her old friends, caused a certain awkwardness.

"And M. d'Armandy, who has brought her here," said Déchelette quickly, to warn the new arrival. Ezano bowed, and began to talk. Fanny reassured, when she saw how her lover was taking things, and proud of him, his good looks, his youth, before these artists and connoisseurs, became very gay and cheerful. Having relinquished herself entirely to her present passion, she scarcely remembered her former relations with these

men, which for all that had imprinted on her habits and fancies, gained in contact with



them, which survived in her even to the fashion she had of rolling cigarettes, as well

as her preference for a certain cigarette paper and Maryland tobacco.

Jean perceived, without feeling the least troubled, this small detail, which formerly would have enraged him, and felt, at finding himself so calm, the joy of a prisoner who has filed through his chain, and knows that the slightest effort will suffice to free him.

"Ah! my poor Fanny" said Caoudal, in a quizzical tone, and pointing at the others, "see what a failing off is there. Are they not old? are they not worn out? You and I, you see, are the only good ones left."

Fanny laughed. "Ah, pardon, Colonel"—she called him that sometimes because of his moustaches—"it is not quite the same thing. I am of a later date."

"Caoudal always forgets that he is of a past age," said La Gournerie, and, noticing a movement of the sculptor, whom he knew he was touching to the quick, continued in his sharp voice, "Medallist in 1840. There's a date, my good fellow!"

There existed between these two old friends a tone of aggression, a sulky antipathy, which had never separated them, but which had been evident in their looks, in their slightest words, for the last twenty years, ever since

the day on which the poet had carried off the sculptor's mistress. Fanny counted for nothing with them now. They had both sought other joys, felt other pains ; but the antagonism still lived, growing deeper and deeper, as time roiled on.

"Now look at us both, and say frankly whether I am the more ancient." Tightly buttoned up in a jacket which displayed his muscles, Caoudal planted himself upright, thrusting out his chest and shaking his flaming locks, in which was not one white hair.

"Medallist in 1840 ; fifty-eight years old in three months. Well, what does that prove ? Is it age that makes a man old ? It is only at the Comédie Française or at the Conservatoire that men are tottering at sixty, nodding their heads, and pottering about with feeble limbs and shuffling gait. At sixty—*sacre bleu !*—one walks more upright than at thirty, because one is cautious, and the women take to one still if the heart is young, and warms and animates the body."

"Do you believe that ?" said La Gournerie, with a sneer, and looking at Fanny. And Déchelette, with his cheerful smile, said :

"Nevertheless, you are always saying

there is nothing like youth, you swear by it."

"It was my little Cousinarde who made me alter my opinion. She is my new model. Eighteen years old ; plump and dimpled all over—a Clodion. And she is such a good child, one of the people, and of the Paris markets, where her mother sells chickens. She says such silly things, you could almost embrace her for them. The other day in the studio she found a novel of Dejoie's ; looking at the title—*Thérèse*—she threw it away with a little pout, saying, 'If that had been called *Poor Thérèse* I would have read it all night.' I am quite gone on her I can tell you."

"So you are in for it again. In six months there will be another separation -- tears, work distasteful, desperate rages, ready to kill everybody."

Caoudal's brow clouded.

"It is true that nothing lasts. One takes somebody and one separates."

"Why do you take any one then ? "

"Well, and you yourself, do you think you are joined for life with your Flemish woman ? "

"Oh, we—we have not gone in for regular housekeeping. Eh, Alice ? "

"Certainly not," replied, in a soft and gentle voice, the young girl, who, mounted on a chair, was gathering some wisteria and leaves for the table. Déchelette continued :

"There will be no rupture in our case, scarcely a leave-taking. We made an agreement for two months. On the last day of the term we shall part, without despair and without surprise. I shall return to Ispahan. I have just engaged my sleeping-car berth, and Alice will return to her little apartment in the Rue La Bruyère, which she still retains."

"On the third floor above the entresol, which is the most convenient for throwing oneself out of window."

The young girl smiled as she said this ; her face was flushed, the light of the dying day was upon her, the heavy bunch of mauve flowers in her hand, but the tone of her voice was so sad and grave that nobody replied to it. The wind freshened, the houses opposite seemed to be higher.

"Let us go to dinner," cried the Colonel, "and let us talk nonsense."

"Yes, that's the thing. *Gaudeamus igitur.* Let us amuse ourselves while we are young."

Isn't that right, Caoudal?" said La Gournerie with a laugh that had a false ring in it.

Jean some days afterwards was passing down the Rue de Rome again, when he found the studio closed, the great canvas awning let down over the window, and a mournful silence reigning from the cellar to the terraced roof. Déchelette had gone at the hour agreed upon. The agreement had come to an end, and Gaussin thought what a fine thing it is to do as one pleases in life—to rule one's reason and one's heart. "Shall I ever have the courage to do so?"

Just then a hand was placed upon his shoulder.

"Good day, Gaussin."

Déchelette, looking fatigued, more yellow and more frowning than usual, explained to him that he had not yet departed, being detained in Paris by some business, that he was staying at the Grand Hotel, having a horror of the studio ever since that dreadful incident.

"What was that?"

"Don't you really know? Alice is dead—she committed suicide. Wait for me till I see whether there are any letters for me."

He returned almost immediately, and while he tore the newspaper wrappers asunder with nervous fingers, he spoke in a dreamy way like a somnambulist, without looking at Gaussin, who was walking beside him.

"Yes, she is dead—threw herself from the window, as she said she would that evening you were there. How could it have been prevented? I knew nothing about it. I had no idea of such a thing. On the day on which I intended to start she said to me, in a quiet way, 'Take me, Déchelette; do not leave me alone—I cannot live without you.' That made me laugh. Just fancy me with a woman over there amongst the Kurds—the desert, the fever, the nights of bivouac! At dinner she kept saying to me, 'I shall not worry you; you shall see how quiet I shall be.' Then, seeing that she only gave me pain, she desisted. Afterwards we went together to a box at the Varieties, which had all been arranged beforehand. She appeared contented, held my hand all the time, and murmured, 'I am happy.' As I was going to leave at night I took her to her rooms in my

carriage, but we were both sad and did not speak. She did not even thank me for the little packet which I slipped into her pocket that contained enough to enable her to live for a year or two. When we reached the Rue La Bruyère she asked me to go up stairs. I would not. ‘I beg you to do so, if only to the door.’ But I was firm, and would not enter. My place was taken, my luggage was packed, and then, I had said ‘Good-bye,’ too often already. As I went down, feeling my heart somewhat bigger than usual, she called after me some words which sounded like, ‘Quicker than you,’ but I did not understand them till I reached the street, when, oh! . . .”

He stopped, his eyes bent upon the ground before the horrible vision which the pavement now presented to him at every step—an inert, groaning black mass.

“She died two hours afterwards without a word, without a complaint, her golden eyes fixed on me to the last. Did she suffer? Did she recognise me? We laid her on her bed just as she was, a large lace mantilla covering her head on one side to hide the wound on the skull. Very pale, with a little blood on her temple, she was still pretty—so

sweet-looking. But as I bent over her to wipe away that drop of blood which always returned as if inexhaustible, her gaze seemed to me to assume an indignant and terrible expression—a mute malediction which the poor girl hurled at me. Now what would it have mattered to me if I had remained a little longer, or had taken her with me, ready for anything, and so little in the way? No, it was pride, the obstinacy of my passed word. Well, I did not give way, and she is dead. Dead for me who loved her too."

He was growing excited, speaking in a loud voice, and gazed at in astonishment by the people he pushed against as they went down the Rue d'Amsterdam ; and Gaussin, passing before his former lodgings with its balcony and verandah, thought of Fanny and their own history, and shuddered while Déchelette continued.

"I followed her to Montparnasse, without any friends or relatives. I wished to be the only one to think about her, and here I have been since thinking of the same thing, not being able to make up my mind to go away with this ever-present idea, and avoiding my house in which I passed two months so happily with her. I live out of doors, I move about,

I try to distract myself, to escape from that eye of death which accuses me under that bloodstained brow."

And stopping, struck by remorse—two great tears rolled down his little flat nose, so good-natured, so fond of life—he said, "Well, my friend, nevertheless I am not wicked, but it was a little too much for me to have done such a thing."

Jean tried to console him, attributing it all to chance and bad luck, but Déchelette repeated, shaking his head, and with clenched teeth,

"No, no. I shall never forgive myself—I should like to punish myself for it."

This wish for expiation did not cease to haunt him; he talked of it to all his friends, to Gaussin, for whom he would call at his office when his work was done.

"You must go away somewhere, Déchelette; travel, work, that will distract your mind," Caoudal and the others would keep saying to him, for they became rather uneasy at his fixed idea, at his morbid wish to make them repeat that he was not wicked. At length one evening, either he wished to see his studio again before going away, or some idea to put an end to his trouble led him there,

he entered his house again, and in the morning some workmen on their way through the street picked him up from the pavement before his door, his skull split, having killed himself in the same way as the woman ; and with the same terrors, under the same crushing



influence of despair, flung himself into the street !

In the dimly-lighted studio a crowd thronged—artists, models, actresses, all the dancers, all the supper-eaters of his latest *fêtes*. There was a noise of shuffling feet, of

whispering, murmurs as in a chapel under the flames of the tapers ; people were looking through the creepers and the leaves, at the body, stretched at full length, wrapped in a flowered silk covering, crowned with a turban to conceal the wound on the head ; the white hands in front spoke of abandonment, the final release, on the low divan shaded by wisteria, on which Gaussin and his mistress had first become acquainted with each other on the night of the ball.



X

PEOPLE do die, then, of such separations. So now when he and Fanny quarrelled he did not dare to speak of his departure : he no longer exclaimed angrily, "Fortunately there will soon be an end of this ;" she had only to reply, "Very well then, go ; I shall kill myself as the other girl did." And this menace, which he fancied he could perceive in the melancholy of her looks, in the songs she sang, and in her silent reveries, troubled him to the verge of apprehension.

Nevertheless he managed to pass the examination for consular *attachés*, the ministerial

stage: well recommended, he was noted for one of the first vacant appointments, which was only a matter of a few weeks—of days. And around them, at this end of the sunny season, everything was hastening towards winter. One morning, Fanny opening the window to the first mist exclaimed,

“ Why, the swallows have gone ! ”

One after the other the tradespeople’s country houses were closed. Along the Versailles road furniture vans followed each other in rapid succession, large omnibuses loaded with packages, with plumes of green plants on the “ knife-board ” : while the leaves on the ground were agitated by whirlwinds, tossed about like clouds under the leaden sky ; and the stacks rose in the bared fields. Behind the orchard, now almost leafless, and looking smaller in consequence, the closed cottages, the drying grounds of the laundries with red-tiled roofs, stood out in clusters in the melancholy landscape, and on the other side of the house the railway, now fully visible, extended its dark lines through the grey-tinted woods.

How cruel it was to leave her alone all day in such a wretched place. He felt already relenting—he never would have courage to

separate from her. It was no doubt on this that she was counting, waiting for the supreme moment, and till then quiet, not referring to it, faithful to her promise not to put obstacles in the way of his departure so long foreseen and agreed to. One day he came home with the news,

“I am nominated.”

“Ah! to what place?”

She asked the question with an assumption of indifference, but with bloodless lips and vacant eyes, and with such a contraction of her features that he could not keep her in suspense. “No, no, I am not going yet. I have relinquished my turn to Hedouin; that will give us another six months at least.”

Then succeeded an outburst of tears, of laughter, of foolish kisses, while she murmured, “Thank you, thank you; what a happy life I will make yours now! It was the idea of your departure that made me naughty, you know.” She would now make up her mind to it, resign herself to it by degrees. And then in six months it would not be autumn, with all its miserable associations of decay.

She kept her word. No more attacks of “nerves,” no more quarrels: and even to

avoid the worry caused by the child, she decided to send him to school at Versailles. He only came home on Sundays, and if this new arrangement did not tame his rebellious, savage nature, it at least taught him hypocrisy. They lived peacefully : the dinners with the Hettémas were eaten without any disturbance, and the piano was once again opened for their favourite songs. But at heart Jean was more troubled, more perplexed than ever ; questioning himself as to whither his weakness was leading him ; thinking sometimes that he would relinquish his consulate and pass his service in the office. It meant Paris, and the housekeeping with Fanny indefinitely prolonged ; but also the dream of his youth and the hopes of his relatives shattered, his undoubted disinheritance by his father, who would never forgive him for throwing up his profession, especially when he became acquainted with the cause.

And for whom ? For an, elderly, faded, woman, whom he no longer cared for ! Of this he had had a proof in face of her lovers. What witchcraft confined him then, in this life *à deux* !

As he got into the train one morning in the last days of October the eyes of

a young lady which met his recalled to him suddenly the meeting in the wood ; the radiant grace of the girl-woman of whom the



remembrance had haunted him for months. She was wearing the same bright-coloured dress which the sun had touched so prettily through

the branches of the trees, but now shrouded in a travelling cloak ; and in the compartment, the books, the small bag, a bouquet of tall reeds and late autumn flowers, told of the return to Paris and the end of the sojourn in the country. She also recognised him with a half smile quivering in her limpid eyes, and there was for a second the unexpressed understanding of the same thought in both minds.

“How is your mother, Monsieur d’Armandy?” suddenly asked old Bouchereau, whom Jean, surprised, had not at first noticed as he reclined in the corner reading, his pale face bent down.

Jean told him the news, very much touched by this remembrance of his relatives and of himself, and still more affected when the young lady inquired for the twins who had written such a pretty letter to her uncle, thanking him for the care of their mother. She knew them ! the idea filled him with joy. Then, as it seemed, he was more than usually sentimental that morning, he immediately became sad on learning that his friends were

returning to Paris, as Bouchereau was about to recommence his lectures at the School of Medicine. He would not have the chance to see her again ; and the fields flying past him, so golden a moment before, now seemed dreary and in the semi-darkness of an eclipse.

There was a long whistling—they had reached Paris. He said “Good-bye,” and left them, but at the exit from the station they met again, and Bouchereau in the crowd told him that after the following Thursday he would be at home in the Place Vendôme if he wished for a cup of tea. She took her uncle’s arm, and it seemed to Jean that it was she who without speaking had invited him.

After having decided many times that he would go to Bouchereau’s house, and having changed his mind—for why cause himself useless regrets?—he hinted nevertheless at home that there would soon be a grand evening party at the Ministry at which he was compelled to be present. Fanny looked over his dress, ironed his white ties, but suddenly on the Thursday evening he did not have the least wish to leave home. But his mistress put before him the necessity of

undergoing the infliction, reproached herself for having taken up so much of his time, and for being so selfish, so she decided him. She playfully helped him to dress, retouched the knot of his tie, the fashion of his hair, laughed because her fingers smelt of the cigarette which she took up and replaced upon the chimney every moment, and said it would cause his partners to make faces. Seeing her so gay and good-natured, he felt some remorse for the deception he was practising, and would willingly have remained at home if Fanny had not insisted on his going, and pushed him out affectionately into the road.

It was late when he came back. She was asleep, and the lamp which revealed this tired slumber recalled to him a similar occasion three years before, after the terrible revelations which he had heard from her. What a coward he had shown himself then! By what want of sense had the fact which should have broken this chain riveted it more tightly? He felt absolutely sick and

disgusted. The room, the bed, the woman, we e all equally distasteful to him ; he took



the light and carried it into the next room softly. He wished so much to be alone, to

think over what had happened to him. Oh ! nothing ; or almost nothing !

He was in love.

There is in certain words which we continually use a hidden spring which suddenly opens them down to the ground, as it were ; explains them to us in all their exceptionable inner meaning, then the word folds itself up again, regains its everyday form and insignificant appearance worn out by habitual and mechanical use. Love is one of these words. Those for whom its depths have been for once entirely unfolded will understand the delicious agony in which Jean had lived for an hour without being able at first to give any account of his sensations.

Yonder in the Place Vendôme, in that corner of the room in which they sat talking for a long while, he was not conscious of anything except of a great happiness, of a soft charm which surrounded him.

It was only when he came away and the

door was shut, that he had been seized with a foolish joyfulness, then with a weakness as if all his veins had been opened. "What is the matter with me?" And the portion of Paris which he traversed on his way home seemed to him quite new, fairy-like, more extensive, and altogether radiant.

Yes, at this hour, when the beasts of night are loosed and prowl around, when the filth from the sewers rises up and is apparent under the yellow gaslight, he, the lover of Sappho, an adept in all kinds of debauchery, saw Paris as the young girl returning from a ball with her head full of waltz tunes which she repeats to the stars beneath her white apparel may see it, the chaste Paris bathed in moonlight where blossom virgin souls—that was the Paris he saw. And suddenly, as he mounted the wide staircase at the railway terminus on his return to his miserable home, he surprised himself by saying aloud, "But I love her, I love her," and it was thus that he had learnt it.

"Are you there, Jean? What are you about?"

Fanny had awakened with a start, alarmed at not finding him beside her. He must kiss her, lie to her, tell her about the ball at the Ministry, of the pretty dresses, and with whom he had danced ; but to escape from this cross-questioning, above all from the caresses which he feared, all impregnated as he is with the memory of the other, he invents a press of work, some drawings for Hettéma.

“There is no fire—you will catch cold.”

“No, no.”

“At least leave the door open, that I may see your lamp.”

He was obliged to keep up the deception to the end, to set out his diagrams on the table ; and then sitting down motionless, holding his breath, he began to think, to recall things ; and to fix his dream he relates it to Césaire in a long letter, while the night wind stirs the branches which creak without any rustling of leaves, while succeeding trains rumble on, and La Balue, worried by the light, moves about restlessly in his little cage,

leaping from perch to perch with half articulate cries.

He tells everything ; the meeting in the wood, in the train, his curious feeling as he entered those rooms which had seemed so melancholy and so tragical on the day of the consultation, with the furtive whisperings in the doorways, the mournful glances exchanged from chair to chair, and which on this evening were thrown open, animated, and noisy in one long illuminated suite.

Bouchereau himself no longer appeared so stern, nor had his eye that dark and disconcerting glance under his long and heavy eyebrows, but the quiet and paternal expression of the kind-hearted man who wished to see everybody happy in his house.

“ Suddenly she came towards me and I beheld nothing more ; her name is Irene ; she is pretty, of pleasing appearance, her hair of the English golden brown, a childish mouth, always ready to laugh. Oh, not that joyous laugh which many women have, and which worries one so much, but the real expansion of youth and happiness. She was born in London, but her father was a Frenchman, and she has no accent at all, only a charming way of pronouncing certain words, of saying

uncle, which every time makes the eyes of old Bouchereau beam affectionately. He adopted her to relieve his brother, who has a numerous family, in place of her sister who married his chief clinical assistant, two years ago, but she, well, does not care about doctors. How she amused me with the folly of that young *savant*, who extracted from his *fiancée* a formal and solemn engagement to bequeath their bodies to the Anthropological Society. She is a bird of passage. She loves ships and the sea, and the sight of a barque going out quite stirs her heart. She told me all this in a very friendly way, quite an English miss in manner, notwithstanding her Parisian grace, and I listened to her, charmed with her voice, her laugh, and with the compatibility of our tastes, with the firm conviction that the happiness of my life was by my side, and that I had to grasp it, to carry it away, far away whithersoever my adventurous career would lead me."

"Won't you come to bed, my own?"

He started, stopped writing, and instinctively hid the letter.

"Directly ; go to sleep, go to sleep."

He spoke to her rather angrily, and with back bent he listened for the return of sleep, for they were very near each other, and yet so far !

"Whatever happens, this meeting and this love will be my deliverance. You know what my life is ; you understand, though we never talk of it, that it is just the same as it used to be, that I have not been able to release myself. But what you do not know is that I was ready to sacrifice fortune, future, everything to the fatal habits to which I was relinquishing myself every day. Now I have found the spring, the leverage which I wanted, and so as not to give my weakness another opportunity, I have sworn to myself not to present myself yonder except as a free man. To-morrow the escape will be made."

But it was neither the next day nor the following one, there must be a cause for escape, a pretext, the culminating point of a

quarrel, when one cries, “I am going away, never to return ;” and Fanny conducted herself as sweetly and pleasantly as in the first illusory days of their housekeeping.

Could he write “It is all over” without any further explanation ? But this violent woman would never let herself be put away thus : she would seek him out, and beard him on the very door of his hotel, or at his office. No, it would be better to meet the question boldly, to convince her of the irrevocable nature of this separation, and without anger, as without pity, enumerate the reasons for it.

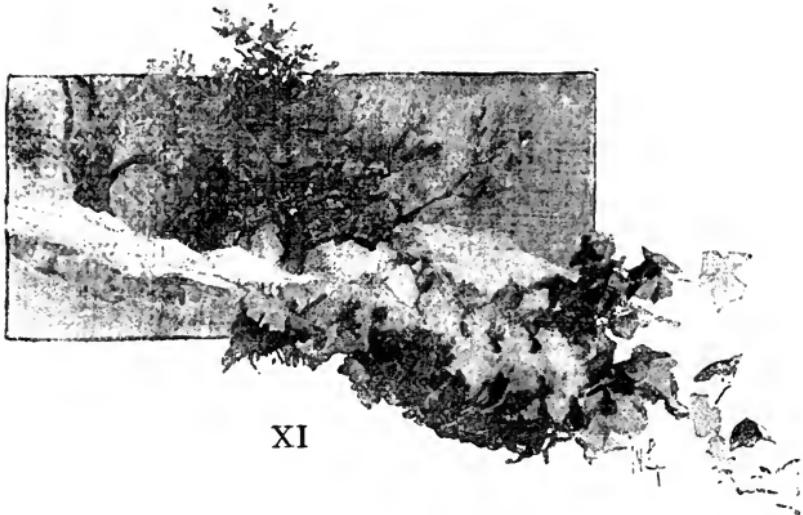
But with these reflections the fear of Alice Dore’s suicide came over him. Opposite their house was a lane leading to the railway closed by a swing gate ; the neighbours used to take that route when hurried, and walk along the line to the station. And the Southerner’s imagination enabled him to see his mistress after the final scene of separation rush out across the road, down the lane, and throw herself under the wheels of the train which was carrying him away. This fear oppressed him to such a degree that the mere sight of the swinging gate between the ivy-covered walls caused him to recoil from the explanation.

Still if he had only a friend, some one to look after her and to help her in the first crisis : but buried in their seclusion, like marmots, they knew nobody, and the unhappy woman



would not have been able to call to her assistance the Hettémas, those monstrous egotists shining and wading in fat, and brutalised still more by the approach of their Esquimaux-like hibernation.

Nevertheless the tie must be broken and broken quickly. In spite of his promise to himself Jean had returned two or three times to the Place Vendôme more and more smitten, and although he had as yet said nothing, the open-armed reception of old Bouchereau, the attitude of Irene, in which reserve was mingled with tenderness and indulgence, and as it seemed the fluttering expectation of a declaration, all warned him not to postpone his intention. Then there was the shamefulness of lying, of the excuses which he had to invent for Fanny, and the species of sacrilege in going from Sappho's kisses to a discreet and hesitating courtship.



XI

IN the midst of these distractions he found on his office table a card left by a gentleman who had already called twice that morning as the messenger told him with a certain awe, inspired by the following description :

C. GAUSSIN D'ARMANDY,

President of the Submersionists of the Rhône Valley,
Member of the Central Investigation and Vigilance Committee,
Departmental Delegate, &c., &c.

Uncle Césaire in Paris ! Le Fénat a delegate,
member of a Vigilance Committee ! He had

not recovered from his surprise when his uncle appeared, still brown as a pine cone, with his foolish eyes, his laugh in the corners of his temples, his Covenanter's beard ; but instead of the old fustian jacket he wore a new cloth frock-coat buttoned over the chest, which gave the little man a truly presidential dignity.

What had brought him to Paris ? The purchase of a force-pump for the immersion of his new vineyards—he pronounced the word force-pump with a conviction which made him seem greater in his own eyes—and also to order his own bust, which his colleagues had requested to embellish the council hall.

‘ You have seen,’ he added modestly, “ that they have nominated me president. My idea of submersion has quite revolutionised the South, and to say that it is, I, Le Fénat, who am in a fair way to save the vines of France ! There are no people like the crack-brained, you see.”

But the principal object of his journey was the separation of his nephew from Fanny. Understanding how the affair would drag on he came to settle it at a blow. “ I know what I am about, you may believe that. When Courbebaisse left his young woman to be

married"—but before starting this story he stopped, unbuttoned his frock-coat and drew from it a bulky pocket-book.

"First of all relieve me of this. Why, certainly it is money—the liberation of the territory." He mistook his nephew's gesture, believing that he refused it from motives of delicacy. "Take it now, take it, I am proud to be able to repay to the son a little of what the father did for me—besides Divonne will have it so—she knows all about this business, and is very glad you think of marrying and shaking off your old fetters."

After a service which his mistress had rendered Césaire, Jean thought this expression "old fetters" rather unjust, and it was with a touch of annoyance that he replied :

"Take back your pocket-book, uncle, you know better than anybody else how indifferent Fanny is to money."

"Yes, she was a good girl," said the uncle in a funeral oration tone. Then he added, winking his crow-footed eyes :

"Just keep the money all the same. With the temptations of Paris about me I would rather it was in your hands than in mine, and one must have it in cases of separation as in duels."

With that he rose, declaring that he was dying of hunger, and that this big question could better be discussed, fork in hand, at breakfast. Always the same frivolity of the Southerner when treating of matters connected with women.

“ Between ourselves, my lad ”— they were then sitting in a restaurant in the Rue de Bourgogne, and his uncle, a napkin tucked under his chin, was talking while Jean, too harassed to eat, was nibbling at his food— “ I think that you take things too tragically. I know very well that the first step is a hard one, the explanation troublesome, but if it be too much for you, don’t say anything, do as Courbebaisse did. Up to the morning of his marriage Mornas was in total ignorance of it. In the evening, after he had left the house of his intended, he went to meet the singer at the music hall and took her home. You will tell me this was very irregular and disloyal. But when one dislikes scenes, and has to do with such terrible women as Paola Mornas ! For nearly ten years this great big fellow

had trembled before this little dark-skinned creature ; to rid himself of her he was obliged to be tricky and to manœuvre, and this was how he managed it.

“The day before the marriage, the 15th of August, the fête day, Césaire proposed to the girl to go fishing with him on the Yvette. Courbebaisse was to join them at dinner, and they were all to return together the next evening, when the smell of dust, fireworks and lamp-oil, would have evaporated from Paris. All went well. There the two of them were lying on the grass on the bank of the little river, sparkling beneath its low banks, making the meadows so green and the willows so full of leaf. After the fishing came bathing. It was not the first time they had swum together like comrades, but on that day little Mornas, her arms and legs naked, her Maugrabin body moulded in her costume as it were, perhaps the idea that Courbebaisse had given him *carte blanche*—Ah, the deceiver ! She turned round, and looking at him very straight, said :

“ ‘ Look here, Césaire, don’t try that again.’

“ He did not persist for fear of spoiling his plan, and he said to himself, ‘ Wait until after dinner.’

"The dinner was very merry on the wooden balcony of the inn, between the two flags which the landlord had hoisted in honour of the 15th of August. It was a hot day, the hay smelt sweetly, and they could hear the drums, the crackers, and the music of the singers who were promenading the street.

"What a stupid that Courbebaisse is not to come till to-morrow,' said La Mornas, who was stretching out her arms and looking as if the champagne had got into her eyes, 'I have a great mind to enjoy myself to-night.'

"And so have I.'

"He was leaning by her side over the railing of the balcony, which was still warm after the sunny day, and, slyly, to sound her, he put his arm round her waist: 'Oh! Paola, Paola,' he said. This time instead of getting angry the singer began to laugh, and so loudly and heartily that he could not help joining her. Another attempt, repulsed in the same fashion, in the evening, when they returned from the fair, where they had danced and shot for macaroons, and as their rooms adjoined she sang through the partition, 'You are too small, you are too small,' making all kinds of unkind comparisons between him and Courbebaisse. He had to

put a restraint upon himself not to answer and to call her the widow Mornas, but it was too soon for that yet. Next morning he sat down to a good breakfast, but Paola got very impatient and restless at last because her lover did not arrive, and it was with a certain satisfaction that he pulled out his watch and said solemnly :

“ ‘ Twelve o’clock : it is done.’

“ ‘ What is done ? ’

“ ‘ He is married.’

“ ‘ Who ? ’

“ ‘ Courbebaisse.’

“ Smack !

“ Ah, my friend, what a buffet that was ! In all my love affairs I never received anything like it. And all of a sudden she must be off. But there was no train before four o’clock, and by that time the faithless one was flying over the P.L.M. Railway towards Italy with his wife. Then in her rage, she scratched me and rained blows upon me. My luck—I had locked the door ; then she took the crockery and smashed it, and at last she fell into a fearful fit of hysterics. At five o’clock they carried her to bed where they kept her, while I, looking as if I had just come out of a bramble bush, ran to fetch the doctor from

Orsay. In these affairs, as in a duel, one ought always to have a doctor with one. You can see me on the road, fasting, and that sun ! It was night when I brought the doctor back. Suddenly as we approached the inn, we heard the murmur of a crowd which had assembled under the windows. Ah, *mon Dieu*, had she committed suicide ? She has killed some one perhaps. In her case the latter was the more likely. I rushed forward and what did I see ? The balcony hung with Venetian lanterns, and the singer standing there, consoled and superb, wrapped in one of the flags, shouting out the Marseillaise in the midst of the Imperial Fête above the head of the applauding multitude.

“ There, my boy, that is how Courbebaisse’s connection ended, but I do not say that it was all over at once. After ten years’ penal servitude, one must always expect a little supervision, but I had the worst of it, and I would go through as much from your young woman if you wished.”

“ Ah ! uncle, but she is not the same kind of woman.”

“ Nonsense,” said Césaire, opening a box of cigars which he held to his ear, to assure himself that they were dry.

"You will not be the first one who has left her."

"That is true, certainly."

Jean recovered his composure at this remark, which would have nearly broken his heart a few months previously ; in fact his uncle had somewhat reassured him by his amusing story ; but what he could not bring himself to face was the double deceit for months, that hypocrisy, the division of his attentions ; he could never succeed in that, and had already waited too long.

"Then what do you wish to do ?"

While the young man was in this state of uncertainty the member of the Vigilance Committee was stroking his beard, practising smiles, effects, and poses of the head. Then in a careless way he asked,

"Does he live far from here ?"

"Whom do you mean ?"

"Why, that artist Caoudal, of whom you spoke to me concerning my bust. We might go and ascertain his price while we are together."

Caoudal, though celebrated and a spendthrift, still occupied the studio in which he had first made a success in the Rue d'Assas. Césaire as they proceeded inquired concern-

ing his artistic position ; he would pay the price certainly, but the committee were determined to have a work of the best kind.

“ Oh, you need not be afraid, uncle, if Caoudal makes up his mind to do it,” and he ran over the titles of the sculptor, Member of the Institute, Commander of the Legion of Honour, and a long list of foreign orders. Le Fénat opened his eyes widely.

“ And you are friends ? ”

“ Great friends.”

“ What a place this Paris is ! What grand friends one makes here.”

Gaussin would have nevertheless felt some shame in confessing that Caoudal was an old lover of Fanny’s and that he had brought them together. But it seemed that Césaire was thinking of this.

“ He is the artist of that *Sappho* which we have at Castelet, isn’t he ? Then he knows your mistress, and can perhaps aid you to separate from her. The Institute, the Legion of Honour, all those things impress a woman.”

Jean did not reply. He also was thinking how he could utilise the influence of the former lover.

And the uncle continued with a loud laugh :

"By the by you know the bronze is no longer in your father's room. When Divonne knew, when I had the misfortune to tell her that it represented your mistress, she would not have it there any longer. Considering the



Consul's mania, the fuss he makes about the feast change, it was not very easy, particularly without letting him suspect the motive. O the women! she has managed so well that now M. Thiers presides upon your father's

chimneypiece, and poor Sappho is seated covered with dust in the Windy Chamber, with the old fire-dogs and disused furniture. Even she suffered some injury in moving, for her chignon and her lyre are broken. The spite of Divonne no doubt brought these evils upon her."

They reached the Rue d'Assas. When he saw the modest and workmanlike appearance of this city of artists, the studios with numbered doors opening upon each side of a long court, bounded by the commonplace buildings of a communal school with its perpetual buzz of reading, the President of the Submersionists began to doubt once more respecting the talent of a man lodged in such an inferior way, but as soon as he had entered Caoudal's studio he knew what was in store for him.

"Not for a hundred thousand francs, not for a million," shouted the sculptor, almost as soon as Gaussin had opened his mouth, and raising by degrees his big body from the divan on which he was lying amid all the disorder, and *abandon* of the studio he said, "A bust—yes—well! but just look at that plaster cast broken into a thousand pieces. My statue for the approaching

Exhibition, which I have just demolished with a mallet. That is what I do with sculpture, and however tempting may be the face of Monsieur——”

“Gaussin d'Armandy, President of——”

Uncle Césaire was going through all his titles, but he had too many of them. Caoudal interrupted, and turning to the young man said :

“ You are looking at me, Gaussin, you think me aged.”

It is true that he looked all his age in the light which fell from above upon the scars, the hollows, and the wounds of this worn-out and dissipated face. His manelike hair, showing bald places like an old carpet, his pendant and flaccid cheeks, his moustache, of the tone of worn-out gilding, which he no longer took the trouble to curl or to dye. What was the use ? Cousinard the little model had left him, “ Yes, my dear fellow, gone off with my moulder—a savage, a brute, but twenty years old ! ”

With angry and ironical intonation he paced up and down the studio knocking over a stool in his way. Suddenly he stopped before a mirror hung with flowers which was above the divan, and looked at himself

with a frightful grimace : “ Am I ugly enough, sufficiently knocked to pieces, as thin and wrinkled as an old cow ! ” He clasped his neck with his hands, and then in the lamentable and comic accents of an old beau who bewails himself, he said, “ And to say that I shall be regretting even this next year ! ”

The uncle remained utterly astonished. This man, an academician, talking thus and relating his low amours ! So there were insensate people everywhere, even in the Institute, and his admiration for the great man was diminished by the sympathy which he felt for his follies.

“ How is Fanny going on ? Are you still at Chaville ? ” asked Caoudal, suddenly growing calm, and seating himself beside Gaussin, whom he tapped familiarly on the shoulder.

“ Ah, poor Fanny, we have not much longer to live together.”

“ You are going away ? ”

“ Yes, soon, and I am going to be married first. I must leave her.”

The sculptor gave vent to a ferocious laugh.

“ Bravo ! I am glad. Avenge us, my lad. Avenge us on all these creatures, let them go

--deceive them—let them weep—miserable jades—you will never do them as much harm as they have done to other people."



Uncle Césaire was intensely pleased.

" You see this gentleman does not look at matters in so tragical a light as you do.

Can you understand that this innocent will not leave her for fear she should commit suicide?"

Jean frankly confessed to the impression which Alice Dore's suicide had made upon him.

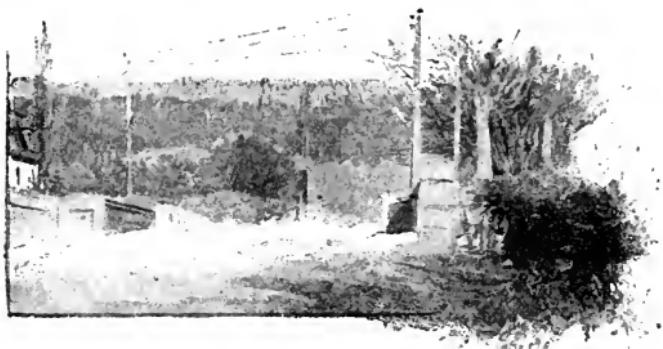
"But that is not at all the same thing," said Caoudal quickly. "She was a melancholy, spiritless girl, a poor doll who wanted sawdust. Déchelette was wrong in fancying that she killed herself on his account, it was a suicide because she was worn out and tired of life. While Sappho! ah! catch her killing herself—she is too fond of love, and will burn down to the end, to the very socket. She is like the race of young comedy actors who never change their class of character, who die without teeth, without eyebrows, but are young lovers to the last. Now look at me—am I likely to kill myself? It is no use to worry. I know very well as this girl is gone I shall take another, and so on. Your mistress will do the same as she has done already. Only she is no longer young, and it will be more difficult now."

The uncle was more delighted—"Are you now reassured? eh?"

Jean made no reply, but his scruples were

overruled and his resolution firmly taken. They were leaving the studio, when the sculptor called them back to show them a photograph picked up from the dusty table, and which he was wiping with his sleeve. "Look, here she is ! Isn't she pretty enough to worship ? What legs, what a throat !" And the contrast between the longing eyes, the impassioned voice, and the senile trembling of the spatulate fingers was terrible, as the sculptor held this smiling portraiture of the dimpled charms of Cousinard the little model.





XII

“ So it’s you ! How early you are ! ”

She came up from the end of the garden, her dress full of windfall apples, and hurried up the steps, somewhat uneasy at the appearance—at once worried and stubborn—of her lover.

“ What is the matter with you ? ”

“ Nothing, nothing—it is the weather, the sun. I want you to take advantage of the last fine day to have a run in the forest, you and I together. Will you ? ”

She still retained an exclamation of the street boy, which occurred to her every time she was more than usually pleased.

“Oh, what a lark!” For more than a month they had not gone out together, having been prevented by the storms and rains of September. One cannot always amuse oneself in the country ; as well live in the ark with Noah’s animals. She had some orders to give in the kitchen because the Hettémas were coming to dinner, and while he was waiting outside on the Pavé des Gardes Jean kept looking at the little house glowing in the soft light of the late summer, at the country road and its wide moss-grown flags, with that farewell in his eyes, that clinging gaze of memory with which we regard places we are about to leave.

Through the open window of the dining-room he could hear the bird singing, and Fanny giving her orders to the servant. “Be sure you don’t forget, half-past six. You will send up the guinea fowl first. Ah, I must give you the linen.” Her voice rang out clear and happy amidst the clattering of the kitchen and the warbling of the bird singing to the sun—but he himself, knowing that their house-keeping would only last two hours longer, was

deeply affected by the sound of these tokens of festivity.

He had a great mind to go into the house and tell her everything straight out, but he was afraid of her cries, of the shocking scene of which the neighbours would all hear, of a scandal which would upset Chaville completely; he knew that if she once let herself go, no earthly consideration would restrain her, so he adhered to his former purpose of taking her into the forest.

“Here I am, quite ready.”

She took his arm joyfully, telling him to speak in a low voice and to walk quickly, as they were passing the house of their neighbours, for fear that Olympe would want to accompany them and so spoil their excursion. She was not at ease until they had passed the railway bridge and had turned to the left into the wood.

It was a soft mild day, the sun tempered by a silvery vapour which pervaded the whole atmosphere, hung upon the copses in which some trees still bearing a few golden leaves, enclosing some magpies’ nests, and some bunches of mistletoe high up. They could hear the cry of a bird like the noise of a file, and the tapping of beaks on the wood

which answered to the strokes of the wood-cutter.

They proceeded slowly, imprinting their footsteps on the ground softened by the autumnal rains. She was heated, having come so fast, her cheeks were glowing, her eyes brilliant, and she paused to take off her great white lace mantilla, a present from Rosa, which she had thrown over her head as they left the house—the delicate and costly relic of former grandeur. The dress she was wearing—a poor black silk frock split under the arms and in the gathers—he had known for three years, and when she held it up passing in front of him and crossing a puddle, he could see that the heels of her boots were worn down at the sides.

How cheerfully she had accepted this semi-misery without regret or complaint, occupied with him and his well-being, never more happy than when she was close to him, her hands clasped over his arm. And Jean asked himself as he gazed at her, quite rejuvenated by the return of the sun and love, what a spring of sap there was in such a being; what a marvellous faculty of forgetting and of pardoning she possessed to enable her to retain so much gaiety and carelessness of manner, after a life of passion, of troubles

and tears, all imprinted on her features, but disappearing at the least expansion of gaiety !

“ It is a real one. I tell you it is a real mushroom.”

She stooped under the brushwood and plunged up to her knees in the dead leaves, returning with her hair loose and tangled by the branches, and showed him the small network on the stem of the mushroom which distinguishes the true from the false one. “ You see it has got the net-work.” And she was delighted !

He did not listen to her : he was absent-minded, asking himself, Is this the moment ? Shall I ? But his courage failed him, she was laughing so merrily, or the place was not a favourable one, and he hurried her farther away still, like an assassin who meditates a crime.

He was about to bring matters to the point when at the turn of the path some one came upon them and disturbed them : it was Hoche-corne, the keeper, whom they met sometimes. Poor fellow, he had lost successively in the little hut which the State granted him on the edge of the pond, two children, then their mother, and all from the same baneful fever. Immediately after the first

decease the doctor had declared that the cottage was unhealthy, being too close to the water and its exhalations ; but notwithstanding his certificates and recommendations, the Government had kept him there two—three—years, time enough for him to see all his loved ones die, with the exception of one little girl, with whom he had gone to live in a new cottage at the entrance of the wood.

Hochecorne, who looked an obstinate Breton, with clear and bold eyes, a forehead receding beneath his uniform cap—a true indication of fidelity, of superstitious obedience—had his gun slung over one shoulder, while on the other rested the head of a sleeping child whom he was carrying.

“How is she ?” asked Fanny, smiling at the little girl, four years old, pale and emaciated by fever, who woke and opened her eyes surrounded by red circles. The keeper sighed as he replied—

“Not well, I must carry her with me everywhere. She will eat hardly anything, she has no appetite. We must have moved too late, and she must have already caught the fever. She is so light. Look, madame, she is like a leaf. One of these days she will pass away like the others. Good God !”

This expression, muttered through his moustache, was the only protest he made against officialism.



"She is trembling ; one would think she was cold."

"'Tis the fever, madame."

"Wait, we will soon warm her." Fanny

took her lace mantilla which was hanging on her arm, and wrapped it round the little girl.

"Yes, yes, let me do it. It will serve for her wedding veil later on."

The father smiled in a heart-broken sort of way, and touching the little hand of the child who was going to sleep again, looking as white as a little corpse, he made her thank the lady, and then left them, with another "Good God!" which was lost in the crackling of the branches under his feet.

Fanny, no longer cheerful, clung to Jean with all the timid affection of a woman whom emotion, sadness, or joy, brings closer to the one she loves. Jean said to himself, "What a good girl she is," but without faltering in his resolution ; on the contrary, he felt more firm, for upon the slope of the path which they were entering arose the image of Irène, the remembrance of whose radiant smile met him there and took possession of him at once, even before he recognised the profound charm of it, the deep source of its intelligent sweetness. He knew that he had waited till the last moment, that that day was Thursday. It must be done, and seeing a cleared space at a little distance he made up his mind that that should be the limit of his hesitation.

A clearing in the wood, some fallen trees surrounded by chips ; pieces of bark ; some faggots, and holes for charcoal-burning. A little lower down the pond could be seen from which a white mist was ascending, and on its margin was the little deserted hut with dilapidated roof and open, broken, windows, the pest house of the Hochecorne family. Beyond that the woods ascended towards Vilizy, a large slope of ruddy foliage, a thick and melancholy looking forest. He stopped suddenly and said—

“ Suppose we rest here for a little while.”

They seated themselves upon a fallen tree, an old oak on which one could perceive where the branches had been by the marks of the axe. It was a pleasant spot, brightened by the pale reflection of the sun, and perfumed by the unseen violets.

“ How nice this is,” she said, as she leant languidly upon his shoulder, and sought a place on his neck to kiss. He drew himself away a little, and took her hand. Then seeing the sternness of his face she became alarmed.

“ Why, what is the matter with you ? ”

“ Some bad news, my poor dear. Hédouin

you know, the man who went away instead of me——” He spoke painfully, in a hoarse voice, the tones of which even astonished himself, but grew stronger as he proceeded with his story which he had prepared beforehand. Hédouin had fallen ill on reaching his post, and he had been directed to take his place. He found that easier to say than to tell the truth. She listened to the end without interrupting him, her face of an ashy paleness, her eyes fixed. “When do you start?” she said, drawing her hand from his.

“Well, this evening—to-night.” Then in a forced and mournful voice he added, “I hope to spend four and twenty hours at Castelet, then to embark at Marseilles.”

“Enough. You need not tell any more lies,” she said with a loud burst of passion as she started to her feet, “you need lie no longer, you don’t know how to do it. The truth is you are going to be married, for a long time your family have been working for this, they are so very much afraid that I shall prevent you from going out to catch typhus or yellow fever. I hope they are satisfied at last. The lady is to your taste I suppose—and when I think how I used to tie your evening ties on those Thursdays! Was I not a fool, eh?”

She laughed a sad, bitter laugh, which contorted her mouth and showed a space at the side caused by the breaking of one of her beautiful teeth of which she was so proud ; it must have happened recently, for he had not observed it before, and this gap in the terrified, hollow, distorted face shocked Gaussin terribly.

“ Listen to me,” said he, taking hold of her, and pulling her towards him forcibly—

“ Yes, I am going to be married, my father is bent on it, as you know very well, but it cannot matter to you since I must go in any case.”

She released herself, but restrained her anger.

“ And it was to tell me this that you made me come a league across the forest. You said to yourself, ‘ At any rate no one shall hear her if she screams out.’ No, you see there is no screaming and not a tear. In the first place, I have had pretty well enough of you, handsome though you be. You can go your way, and I will never call you back. Off with you, then, abroad with your wife, your little one, as they say in your country. She ought to be a nice one, that same little girl, ugly as a gorilla, or else

enceinte, for you are as stupid as those who have chosen her for you."

She restrained herself no longer, but launched out into a torrent of abuse and insult, until she could only stammer such words as, coward, liar, coward, under his very nose as one thrusts a clenched hand.

It was now Jean's turn to listen without answering, without even an attempt to check her. He was glad she was thus insulting and low, the true daughter of Père Legrand, the separation would be less cruel. Was she conscious of this? At any rate she ceased suddenly, fell forward on her lover's knees with a great sob which seemed to shake her whole body, and in a broken voice she cried, "Forgive me; have mercy on me. I love you. I have no one but you. My love, my life do not do this—do not leave me. What do you expect that I should become?"

Emotion overcame him. This is what he had been afraid of. Sympathetic tears rose in his eyes, and he had to throw his head back to keep them in, endeavouring to calm her by silly words and the reasonable argument, "But since I must go."

She raised herself up again with this cry which betrayed all her hope.

"Ah, you would not have gone, though. I would have said stay. Let me love you still. Do you believe that one can be loved twice as I love you? You have plenty of time to marry—you are so young. I shall soon be played out, and then we shall separate naturally."

He wished to rise, he had the courage to do so, and to tell her that all she was doing was useless ; but clinging round him, dragging her knees in the mud which lay in the hollow, she forced him to resume his seat, and before him, between his knees, with her breath, the voluptuous glance in her eyes, and with childish caresses, her hands upon his fixed face, her fingers in his hair, in his mouth, she tried to re-kindle the cold embers of their love, talked to him softly of their past joys, the happiness of their Sunday afternoons. All that was nothing to what she would do in the future, she would give him new pleasures, other delights, and invent them for him.

And while she was whispering these words great tears ran down her face, on which rested an expression of agony and terror, as she writhed and cried in a dreamy voice, "Oh, it must not be ! Say it is not true that

you are going to leave me." And then came sobs, and groans, and cries for help as if she saw a knife in his hands.

The executioner was scarcely more brave than was the victim. He did not fear her anger more than her caresses, but he was defenceless against this despair, this clamour which filled the wood, and extended over the stagnant and fever laden water into which the sad red sun was setting. He had made up his mind to suffer, but not so acutely, and all the glamour of the new love was necessary to enable him to resist taking her by both hands and saying, "I will remain. Be quiet. I will stay."

How much time had they passed thus exhausting themselves? The sun was no more than a narrow bar of light in the west, the pond was of a leaden hue, and one would have said that its unhealthy exhalations were extending over the wastes, and the woods, and the hills opposite. In the gathering gloom he could see only the pale face uplifted to his, that open mouth ceaselessly moaning. Soon afterwards as night fell the sound became hushed. Now there came floods of tears unending—one of those long rains which set in in the climax of the storm

—and from time to time an exclamation, an “Oh!” deep and hollow, as if some horrible



thing was being pushed aside, and kept as constantly recurring.

Then it was all over. The horror is gone. A cold wind arises, shakes the branches, wafting towards them the echo of some distant chime.

"Come, let us go. Don't stop here."

He raised her gently, felt her unresisting in his hands, obedient as a child, and shaken with heavy sighs. She seems still to be afraid of something, to have a respect for the man who has shown himself so strong. She walks beside him step by step, but timidly, not arm in arm; and to see them thus walking unsteadily and dejected, making their way along the paths by the yellow reflection of the ground, one would have said that they were a couple of peasants going home, worn out by hard work in the open air.

At the edge of the wood a light appeared from Hochecorne's open door, revealing the forms of two men. "Is that you, Gaussin?" asked the voice of Hettéma, who was coming with the keeper to meet them. They had begun to be uneasy at their absence, and in consequence of the groans which they had heard through the wood. Hochecorne was about to take his gun and set out in search of them.

"Good evening, sir, and madam. The

little girl is greatly pleased with her shawl. I was obliged to put her in bed in it."

Their last action in common, this act of charity so lately performed, their hands clasped for the last time around the little body of the dying child!

"Good bye, good bye, Hochecorne." And they all three hastened home, Hettéma very much puzzled concerning the noise which had filled the wood. "It rose and fell as if some wild beast was being strangled. How was it you did not hear anything of it?"

Neither of the two made any reply.

At the corner of the Pavé des Gardes Jean hesitates.

"Stay to dinner," she said to him in a low, pleading voice. "Your train has gone, you can catch the nine o'clock train."

He goes in with them. What has he to fear? Such a scene could not be repeated, and it is the least he can do to give her this small comfort.

The room is warm, the lamp burns brightly, and the sound of their footsteps has already warned the servant, who was placing the soup on the table.

"Here you are at last," said Olympe, who was already seated, her *serviette* tucked under

her short arms. She is uncovering the souptureen, but stops suddenly, exclaiming, "*Mon Dieu*, my dear!"

Wan, ten years older, her eyes swollen and bloodshot, mud on her dress, even in her hair, having the startled, disordered look of a street-walker who has just escaped from the police, was Fanny. She breathes hard for a moment, her poor burning eyes winking at the light, and by degrees the warmth of the little house, the prettily laid table, arouse the memory of happy days. A new outburst of tears succeeds, through which one can distinguish these words :

"He is leaving me, he is going to be married."

Hettéma, his wife, the peasant woman who waits on them, all look at each other and at Gaussin. "Well, let's have dinner, at any rate," said the fat man, who seemed to be very angry, and the noise of the spoons is mingled with the splashing of water in the next room where Fanny is sponging her face. When she returns all powdered, in a white woollen dressing gown, the Hettémas watch her in agony, expecting some new outbreak, and are very much astonished to see her silently throw herself glutton-

ously upon her food like a shipwrecked person, filling the hollow of her grief and the gulf of her cries with anything she could lay her hands on—bread, cabbage, a guinea fowl's wing, potatoes. She ate and ate.

They talk at first in a constrained way, then more freely, and as with the Hettémas everything is flat and material, such as how pancakes would go with sweetmeats, or whether hair is better to sleep upon than feathers, they reach the coffee stage of dinner without any disturbance. The fat couple flavour their coffee with burnt sugar, and sip it slowly with their elbows on the table.

It is a pleasure to see the confiding and tranquil glances which these heavy companions of stall and litter exchange. They have no wish to separate. Jean surprises these looks, and in the intimacy of this room, full of memories and familiar objects, the torpor of fatigue, of digestion, of comfort, creeps over him. Fanny, who is watching him closely, brings her chair nearer to him, puts her hand on his knees, and passes her arm under his.

“Listen,” he said roughly, “there is nine o'clock, quick, good-bye, I will write to you.”

He was up and across the road, feeling in the dark to open the gate. Two arms encircle him. "Kiss me at least."

He feels himself beneath the open dressing-gown against her flesh, penetrated by the odour and warmth, upset by the parting kiss which leaves in his mouth the taste of fever and tears, and she says softly, feeling him yield, "Stay one more night, only one."

A signal on the line, the train is approaching.

How had he the strength to disengage himself, to rush to the railway station, the lamps of which were glimmering through the leafless branches? He was still wondering at himself, as seated breathless in the corner of the carriage, he watches through the window for the lights of the little house, for a white form at the gate. "Adieu! adieu! And this cry relieved him from the silent fear which he had begun to entertain at the curve of the line of seeing his mistress in the place he had seen her in his dreadful dream.

With his head out of the window he watched passing away and diminishing, becoming confused in the distance, their little house, the light in which was now but that of

a wandering star. Suddenly he felt a joy, a great relief. How freely he could breathe, how beautiful was all that valley of Meudon, and those grand black hills, forming in the distance a triangle twinkling with innumerable lights, trending towards the Seine in regular lines. Irène was waiting him there, and he was rushing to join her with all the speed of



the train, with all the desire of a lover, with all his determination to lead an honest and new life.

Paris! he called a cab to drive to the Place Vendôme, but in the gas light he perceived the condition in which his clothes were, covered with mud as all his past life

clung to him heavily and filthily. "Oh no, not to-night." So he proceeded to his old lodgings in the Rue Jacob, where Le Fénat had bespoken a room for him next to his own.



XIII

NEXT day, Césaire, who had undertaken the delicate commission of going to Chaville to bring away his nephew's effects and books, and clinch the separation by this removal, came back very late, so much so, that Gaussin had already begun to worry himself with all kinds of foolish and gloomy prognostications. At last a cab, heavy as a hearse, turned the corner of the street laden with corded boxes, and one enormous trunk which he recognised as his own ; then his uncle entered, mysterious and heartbroken.

"I have been a long time, but I wanted to make one journey of it, and not to be obliged to go there again." Then pointing to the

boxes which the two servants were ranging round the room, he continued, "Here is the linen, the clothes; yonder are your papers and books. Nothing is wanting but your letters. She begged me to leave her those so that she might read them over again, and keep something of yours. I thought that would not matter, she is such a good girl."

He breathed hard for a long while, seated on the trunk mopping his face with an unbleached silk handkerchief as big as a napkin. Jean did not dare to ask particulars, or in what condition he had found her; his uncle told him nothing for fear of making him sad. And they filled up the awkward silence, full of unexpressed thoughts, with remarks about the weather, which had suddenly become cold the night before, the mournful aspect of that deserted suburb of Paris, studded with factory chimneys and enormous métal cylinders the reservoirs of market gardeners. Then, after a while, Jean said :

"She did not give you anything for me, uncle?"

"No, you may be quite easy, she will not bother you any more. She has accepted the situation with great resolution and dignity."

Why did Jean see in these words an implication of blame, a reproach to him for his harshness?

"All the same," continued uncle Césaire, "I would rather have Morna's nails than this unfortunate girl's despair."

"Did she weep very much?"

"Ah, my friend, so much and so bitterly, that I myself sobbed at the sight of it without having the strength to"—he snorted and shook his emotion away with the movement of his head like an old goat. "After all, what could you do? It is not your fault; you cannot pass all your life there. Things have been very properly arranged. You have left her money and a furnished house, and now let your love go, let your marriage proceed. Such affairs are too serious for me, I declare; the Consul must interest himself in that. I am only useful in arranging left-handed settlements." Then, suddenly seized with a melancholy fit, his face against the window pane looking at the lowering sky and the rain on the roofs, "Ah, well, the world is becoming very sad; in my time people separated much more cheerfully than they do now," he said.

When Le Fénat had gone away with his

pumping machine, Jean, deprived of his good-humoured and chattering companion, had a long week to pass, an impression of vacancy and solitude, all the blankness of widower-hood to endure. In such a case as this, even without the regret of passion, one feels the want of the companion who is missing ; for existence with another person, the cohabitation of table and bed creates a tissue of invisible and subtle bonds, the real strength of which only reveals itself in sorrow, or in the effort to release oneself from them. The influence of contact and of habit is so wonderfully penetrating, that two people living the same life together come to resemble one another in time.

His five years passed with Sappho had not been sufficient to mould him to this form, but his frame preserved the marks of the chain, and he felt its weight. And even many times he involuntarily directed his steps towards Chaville on leaving his office. It often happened that he searched beside him on the pillow for the heavy black tresses, destitute of a comb, on which his first kiss used to fall.

The evenings seemed particularly wearisome in that room, which reminded him of

the first days of his connection, the presence of another mistress, refined and silent, whose little card scented his glass with a subtle perfume, and with the mystery of her name—Fanny Legrand. At such times he would seek to fatigue himself with long walks, to daze himself with the popular ditties and the lights of some little theatre, until old Bouchereau gave him permission to pass three evenings of the week with his *fiancée*.

All was at length arranged. Irène loved him. Uncle had no objection. The marriage was to take place in the beginning of April, at the end of the term. Three months of winter to see each other, to know and long for each other; to put a loving and delightful construction upon that first look which binds souls together, and on the first confession that troubles them.

On the evening on which the contract was signed, Jean returned home, and not feeling inclined to sleep, conceived the idea of putting his room into ship-shape and working order, in compliance with that natural instinct to put our life in accord with our ideas. He arranged his table and his books, which had hitherto remained unpacked, stowed away

in the hastily-made boxes, amid handkerchiefs and a garden jacket. From amid the leaves of a dictionary on Commercial Law, the most used book, there fell a letter, without envelope, in his mistress' handwriting.

Fanny had confided it to the chances of future work, distrusting Césaire's too short-lived sentiment, believing that it would reach its destination more safely by these means. He was unwilling to peruse it at first, but yielding to the opening words, very tender, very sensible, and in which only the shaking hand and the irregular lines betrayed her agitation. She only asked one favour—only one—that he would go and see her now and then. She would complain of nothing, reproach him with nothing, not even with his marriage and the separation which she knew was absolute and definite. But only let her see him !

“ Just reflect what a terrible blow this is for me ; so sudden, so unexpected as it was. I feel as if there had been a death or a fire in the house—not knowing what to do. I weep, I wait ! I contemplate the scene of my happiness. You alone could accustom me to the new condition of things. It would be a charity to come and see me, so that I

may not feel quite so lonely. I am afraid of myself!"

These complaints, this supplicating appeal, ran all through the letter, ending with the same words—"Come, come." He could almost have believed that he was in the open space in the midst of the forest, with Fanny at his feet, and, in the violet hue of the evening light, that poor face, all tear-stained and swollen, uplifted to his, while the lips were parted in a cry. This vision haunted him all night, it troubled his sleep, and not the happy intoxication which he had enjoyed yonder with her. It was the aged and seamed face which he saw, notwithstanding all his efforts to put between it and himself that pure countenance with the tint of a carnation in bloom, which the confession of affection tinted with little rosy flames under the eyes.

This letter was eight days old ; eight days the unhappy woman had been expecting a line or a visit ; the encouragement to resignation which she begged for. But how was it she had not written since? Perhaps she was ill : and all his old fears returned. He thought that Hettéma might be able to give him some news, and confident of his punc-

tuality and regularity, he went and waited for him outside the Artillery Department.

The last stroke of ten was booming from the church of St. Thomas Aquinas when the fat man turned the corner of the little square, his collar turned up, his pipe held in his mouth with both hands in order to warm his fingers. Jean watched him approaching from a distance, and felt greatly moved by the memories which his appearance conjured up, but Hettéma accosted him with scarce concealed ill-temper. "You here ! I think we have cursed you pretty well this last week—we who went into the country to be quiet ! "

And, on the doorstep as he finished his pipe, Hettéma told him how on the previous Sunday they had asked Fanny to dinner with them, and the child too whose day out it was, with the intention to divert her mind a little from distressing thoughts. As a matter of fact, she was cheerful enough at dinner, she even sang them a song during dessert ; they separated about ten o'clock, and the Hettémas were about to turn deliciously into bed, when suddenly a knocking came at the shutters, and they heard little Josaph's terrified voice crying out :

"Come quickly : mamma is going to poison herself."

Hettéma rushed out and arrived just in



time to snatch forcibly from Fanny a phial of laudanum. There was a struggle : he had to pinion her in his arms, and defend

himself from the blows which she showered on his head, and from the comb with which she scratched his face. In the struggle the phial was broken, the laudanum was spilt, and his clothes were saturated and tainted with the poison. “ You may imagine what such scenes, what all the varied dramas, mean for quiet people. So I’ve done with it. I’ve given notice, and next month I move.” He replaced his pipe in its case, and with a quiet *adieu* disappeared beneath the low arch of the little court-yard, leaving Gaussin quite upset by what he had heard.

He pictured to himself the scene in that room which had been their room. The fright of the child calling for help, the brutal struggle with the fat man ; and he seemed to perceive the opium flavour, the somnolent bitterness of the spilled laudanum. This horror was present to him all day, aggravated by the thoughts of loneliness in which she would soon be left. When the H  ttemas had gone, who would stay her hand from another attempt ?

A letter arrived which reassured him somewhat. Fanny thanked him for not being so hard as he wished to appear, because he still took some interest in the poor abandoned

creature ! You were told, were not you ? I wished to die, because I felt so lonely. I have tried—I could not succeed. They stopped me : my hand shook, perhaps, the fear of suffering—of becoming ugly ! Oh ! how had that little Doré the courage ? After the first shame of failure it was a joy to think that I could write to you, love you at a distance, see you again—for I have not abandoned the hope that I may see you again once more ; as people go to see an unhappy friend in a house of mourning from pity only—only pity !”

Thenceforth there came from Chaville every second or third day a capricious correspondence—long, short, a journal of sorrow—which he had not the strength of mind to send back, and which enlarged in his tender heart the raw place of that pity without love, no longer for his mistress, but for the human being suffering on his account.

One day it was the account of her neighbours' departure : the witnesses of her past happiness who carried with them so many reminiscences. Now she had nothing to recall him but the furniture. The walls of the little house, and the servant—a poor savage creature—as little interested in any-

thing as the oriole, shaking with cold, sadly perched in a corner of his cage.

On another occasion a pale sunbeam brightening the window caused her to awake joyfully, with the impression that he would come that day. Why? It was merely an idea. Immediately she began to tidy up the house, and the woman made herself neat in her Sunday dress and the head-dress he liked: then towards evening till daylight died away she counted the trains from the window of the dining-room, listened for his footstep on the Pavé des Gardes. Must not she have been silly?

Sometimes there was only a line. It is raining—it is dark and gloomy—I am alone—weeping for you. Or again, she would content herself with putting in an envelope a poor flower all damp and stiffened by the frost, the last in their little garden. Better than all complaints, this flower picked from under the snow spoke of winter, of solitude, and abandonment. He could see the place at the end of the walk, and alongside the flower-beds a woman's dress, wet all round the hem, passing backwards and forwards in a solitary promenade.

This feeling of pity, which wrung his heart,

caused him to live still with Fanny, notwithstanding the separation. He thought of her and pictured her to himself every hour, but by a singular failing of his memory, although scarcely more than five or six weeks had passed since their separation, and the smallest details of the interior of the house were still present to him—the cage of La Balue opposite the cuckoo clock won at a country fair, even to the branches of the nut-tree, which at the slightest movement of the air beat against the window of the dressing-room—the woman herself did not appear to him any longer distinct. He saw her as it was in a mist with one detail of her face, accentuated and distressful, the deformed mouth, the smile spoiled by the want of a tooth.

Aged to this extent, what would become of her, that poor creature with whom he had lived so long? When she had spent the money which he had left her, whither would she go? To what depth would she fall? And all of a sudden there came into his mind the remembrance of the unfortunate woman whom he had met in an English tavern that evening, dying of thirst before her plate of smoked salmon. Would she come to that? She whose care, whose

passionate and faithful tenderness he had so long experienced ! This idea made him feel desperate ; yet what was he to do ? Because he had had the misfortune to meet with this woman and to live with her some time, was he to be condemned to keep her always, to sacrifice his happiness to her ? Why should he, and not others, do so ? Why, in the name of justice !

While preventing himself from seeing her, he wrote to her, and his letters, purposely decided and cold, betrayed his feelings under his practical advice. He suggested that she should take Joseph from school and keep him with her to amuse and occupy her, but Fanny refused. What was the use of bringing the child into the presence of her grief and dejection ? It was enough on a Sunday, when he climbed from one chair to another, ran about from dining-room to garden, perceiving that some great misfortune had saddened the house, and no longer daring to ask for news of "Papa Jean" since he had been told with sobs that he had gone away, and would never come back again.

"All my papas go away, then ! "

This remark of the little abandoned child,

appearing in the heart-broken letter, lay heavy on Gaussin's heart. Very soon the thought of her remaining at Chaville became



so oppressive that he suggested she should return to Paris, and see her friends again. With her sad experience of men, and her separations, Fanny in this offer saw only

a terrible selfishness, the desire to be quit of her for ever, by one of those sudden whims with which she was familiar, and she expressed herself plainly on the subject.

" You know what I have told you before—I will remain your wife, in spite of everything, your loving and faithful wife. Our little house is so identified with you that I would not leave it for the world. What could I do in Paris? I am disgusted with my past, which drives you away, and then think to what you would expose us. You imagine then that you are very firm—well, come and see me once, you naughty fellow, only once." He did not go, but one Sunday afternoon, when he was working alone, he heard two gentle taps at his door—he trembled, knowing very well the manner in which she used to announce herself. Afraid of being stopped, she had come up direct without asking permission. He approached the door, his steps deadened by the carpet, hearing her breathing though the cracks of the panelling.

" Jean, are you there?"

Oh, what a humble and broken voice it was. Once more, and not loudly, " Jean," then a sad sigh, the rustle of a letter,

and the kiss of farewell which she threw him.

Only when she had slowly descended the staircase, step by step, as if she expected to be called back, did Jean pick up and open the letter. They had that morning buried the little Hochecorne at the Hospital for sick children. She had come up with the father and some people from Chaville, and had not been able to resist mounting the stairs to see him, or to leave those lines written in anticipation. "Just as I told you—if I were to live in Paris I should always be on your staircase. Adieu, my own; I am going back to our house."

As he read this his eyes were suffused with tears; he recalled a similar scene in the Rue de l'Arcade, the sadness of the discarded lover—the letter slipped under the door, and Fanny's heartless laughter. So she loved him more than he loved Irène, or may it not be that the man, more mixed up in the business of life and its struggles, has not, like her, the exclusiveness of love, the forgetfulness and indifference towards everything which does not relate to her absorbing and single affection?

This torture, this access of pity from

which he was suffering, was only appeased when he was with Irène—here alone his agony was alleviated and dispersed beneath the glance of her blue eyes. There only remained to him a great weariness, a wish to rest his head upon her shoulder, and remain without speaking, without moving, in the shelter of her presence.

“What is the matter with you?” she would say to him. “Are you not happy?”

“Yes, very happy.” But why in his happiness was he so sad and tearful? There were moments when he felt inclined to tell her everything as if she were an intelligent and good friend, never thinking, poor fool, of the troubles which such confidences give rise to in innocent hearts, of the incurable wounds which they inflict in trustful affection. Ah! if he could only have carried her off, eloped with her, he felt that that would put an end to his torture; but Bouchereau would not remit one hour of the time already fixed. “I am old, I am ailing, I shall see my child no more—do not deprive me of those last days.”

Under his stern exterior he was the best of men; condemned unreservedly to die

from the heart disease, whose progress he followed and noted ; he spoke of it with wonderful coolness, continued his course of lectures, even half suffocating, and performed osculation for patients less seriously attacked than himself. One single weakness in his mighty mind, and one indicating the peasant origin of the Tourangeau, was his respect for the nobility. So the remembrance of the little towers of Castelet and the ancient name of Armandy had not been altogether without their influence in causing him to accept Jean so readily as his niece's husband.

The wedding was to take place at Jean's house, so that his mother would not have to be moved. Every week she dictated to Divonne, or to one of the twins, an affectionate letter to her future daughter-in-law, and it was a great pleasure to him to talk with Irène about his people, to find Castelet in the Place Vendôme, all his affections wrapped round his dear *fiancée*.

But he was rather alarmed at feeling so old, so worn out compared to her, to see her childish pleasure in things which no longer amused him, in joys of married life together, which he had already discounted. So the

inventory of everything they would require to take out to the Consulate, the furniture and materials to choose, had to be made, a list in the midst of which he suddenly stopped one evening, pen in hand, alarmed at the return which he was making towards his house-keeping in the Rue d'Amsterdam, and at the inevitable recommencement of so many happy joys, already done with, exhausted by those five years with one woman, in a travesty of marriage and its responsibilities.





XIV

"YES, my dear fellow, he died last night in Rosa's arms. I have just left him to be stuffed."

De Potter, the composer, whom Jean had met coming out of a shop in the Rue du Bac, clung on to him with an effusion very foreign to his hard business-like appearance, and related the martyrdom of poor Bichito, killed by the Parisian winter; shrivelled with cold, notwithstanding all the wadding, and the spirit-lamp which had been kept burning for two months under his little nest, as one might do for prematurely-born children.

Nothing could prevent him from shivering ; and the night before, when they were all standing round him, the last thrill shook him from head to tail, and he died a good Christian, thanks to the amount of holy water which mother Pilar sprinkled on his rough skin as his life ebbed away in changing colours and prismatic waves, while Pilar said, with eyes upraised to heaven, "*Dios loui pardonne !*"

"I laugh about it, but my heart is very heavy all the same, especially when I think of the grief of my poor Rosa, whom I have left in tears. Fortunately, Fanny was with her."

"Fanny ? "

"Yes ; it is some time since we saw her. She came this morning, in the midst of our drama, and the good girl remained to comfort her friend." Then he added, without noticing the impression his words made, "So it is all over ? You are no longer together ? You remember our conversation on the lake at Enghien. At any rate you profit by the lessons one teaches you." And it seemed as if envy were mixed with his approbation.

Gaussin, with knitted brows, experienced real uneasiness when he reflected that Fanny had gone back to Rosario's house, but he

was annoyed with himself for this weakness, having, after all, no right to interfere with her existence.

Before a house in the Rue de Beaune, a very old street in that formerly aristocratic part of Paris, de Potter stopped. He lived, or was said to live, here for appearance' sake, for actually his time was spent either in the Avenue de Villiers or at Enghien, and he only appeared now and then under the conjugal roof, so that his wife and child should not appear altogether abandoned.

Jean was already about to continue his way, and was bidding de Potter good-bye, but the latter held his fingers in his long hands, hard from continual playing on the piano, and without the least embarrassment, like a man whom his vice never worries, said :

“ Do me a favour. Come up-stairs with me. I ought to dine with my wife to-day, but I cannot leave my poor Rosa all alone in her despair. You will serve as a pretext for my going out, and will save me a worrying explanation.”

The musician's study, in a splendid but cold suite of apartments on the second floor, made one feel the desolation of a room in which no work is done. It was too tidy.

There was no disorder in it ; none of that feverish activity which impresses itself on the furniture and other objects. Not a book, not a page on the table, which was occupied by an enormous bronze ink-bottle as dry and as gleaming as it had been in a shop window, not the least piece of music score on the old piano, in the form of a spinette, which had inspired his first compositions. And a bust in white marble, the bust of a young woman with delicate features and a sweet expression, quite pale in the fading light of day, made the draped and fireless grate look colder still, as it seemed to be gazing sadly at the walls charged with gilt and be-ribboned crowns, with medals and commemorative frames, the whole glorious and vain collection left generously to his wife as compensation, and which she preserved as ornaments on the tomb of her happiness.

They had scarcely entered when the door of the study opened, and Madame de Potter appeared.

“ Is that you, Gustave ? ”

She thought he was alone, but stopped at perceiving the stranger, visibly embarrassed. Elegant, pretty, and dressed in good style, she seemed even more refined than her bust

indicated, the sweet features displaying a firm and courageous resolution. In society opinions were divided concerning the character of the wife. Some people blamed her for putting up with the plain disdain of her husband, that other connection being well known. Others, on the contrary, admired her silent resignation; but the general opinion held that she was an easy-going woman who preferred quiet to everything else, finding sufficient compensation for her "widowhood" in the caresses of a beautiful child, and her pleasure in bearing the name of an illustrious man.

But while the composer was introducing his companion, and concocting no matter what falsehood to get out of the embarrassment of a family dinner, by the uneasiness of the youthful feminine face, and the fixity of the regard which no longer saw anything, which heard nothing, like one absorbed in grief, Jean could perceive that some deep sorrow lay beneath this fashionable exterior. She appeared to accept as true the story which she did not believe, and contented herself by saying softly :

"Raymond will cry; I promised him that we would dine at his bedside."

"How is he?" asked de Potter, absently and impatiently.

"Better, but he coughs incessantly. Will not you come and see him?"

He murmured something in his moustache, pretending to look around the room for something. "Not just now—in a hurry—an appointment at the club at six." He wanted to avoid being alone with her.

"Adieu, then," said the young wife, suddenly composing her features again, just as a sheet of pure water resumes its calmness after having been stirred to its depths by a stone. She bowed and disappeared.

"Let us be off!"

And de Potter, at liberty, dragged away Gaussin, who was looking at this deceptive personage, attired stiffly and correctly in his long English-cut overcoat, going down-stairs before him. This person, who had been so moved when he was carrying the chameleon to be stuffed, was going away without even kissing his sick child!

"All this, my dear fellow," said the composer, as if in reply to his friend's thoughts, "is the fault of those who compelled me to marry. What nonsense it was to try to make a husband and a father of me! I was Rosa's

lover. I am so still, and so I shall remain until one of us is dead. A vice which lays hold of you at a favourable moment, which grasps you firmly; can you ever get rid of it? And you yourself, are you certain that if Fanny had wanted—!” He hailed an empty, passing cab, and as he got into it said,

“Apropos of Fanny, you have heard the news? Flamant is pardoned—he has come out of Mazas. It was on Déchelette’s petition. Poor Déchelette! He has benefited some one even after his death!”

Motionless, with an eager desire to run after and cling to those wheels, which were speeding along the dark street in which the gas was being lighted, Gaussin was astonished to feel himself so moved. “Flamant pardoned! Come out of Mazas!” he repeated these words to himself in a low voice, and in them perceived the cause of Fanny’s silence for the last few days, her lamentations so suddenly interrupted, dying away amid the caresses of a consoler, for the first thought of the miserable man when he had been released would be for her—of course.

He recalled the amorous correspondence dated from the prison, the obstinacy of his mistress in defending him, while she now

held the others so cheaply : and instead of feeling pleased at an incident which logically relieved him from all anxiety, all remorse, an undefinable anguish kept him awake and feverish a part of the night. Why ? He no longer cared for her ; he was only thinking of his letters, which remained in the hands of this woman, and which she would perhaps read to another man, and of which, for all one knew, she might make use of to trouble his repose and his happiness.

This anxiety about his letters, real or false, or hiding within it some care of another kind, decided him on visiting Chaville, which he had hitherto obstinately refused to do. But to whom could he have confided such a delicate mission? One morning in February he took the ten o'clock train, very composed both in heart and mind, his only fear that the house might be shut up, and that the woman might have gone away with her criminal lover.

When the curve in the line was reached, the open shutters, the curtained windows, reassured him ; and recollecting his emotion, when he saw the small gleam of light twinkling behind him through the darkness, he smiled at himself, and at the vagueness of his impressions. He was no longer the same

man who had lately passed that way, and assuredly he would not find the same woman. Yet only two months had elapsed. The wood beside which the train ran had put out no new leaves, it had retained the same brown look as on the day of their separation, of her echoing clamour.

He alone got out at the station, and in the chill and penetrating mist took the path, all slippery with frozen snow, beneath the railway arch, meeting no one before he reached the Pavé des Gardes, turning into which he encountered a man and a child, followed by a railway porter pushing a barrow laden with luggage.

The child, wrapped up in a comforter, his cap drawn down over his ears, suppressed a cry as he passed close to him. "Why, that is Josaph," said Jean to himself, somewhat surprised and sad at the lad's ingratitude, and turning round he met the gaze of the man, who accompanied the child. That fine and intelligent face paled by imprisonment, those ready-made clothes only newly purchased, that fair beard which had not had time to grow long since he had been discharged from Mazas. *Flamant, parbleu !* And Josaph was his son !

In a flash the whole of the facts were

revealed to him ! He perceived, understood everything, from the letter written in prison when the handsome engraver had confided to his mistress the child in the provinces, until the mysterious arrival of the lad, and the embarrassed manner in which the Hettémas had spoken of the adopted one : the glances exchanged between Fanny and Olympe, for they had all conspired to make him support the forger's son. Oh, what a fool he had been, and how they must have laughed ! A feeling of disgust for all his hateful past came upon him, and a longing to run far away ; but there were things troubling him which he was desirous to set at rest. The man and the child had gone, why not Fanny ? And then his letters ! He must have his letters, he could leave nothing behind him in this abode of uncleanness and misery.

“ Madame, here is monsieur.”

“ What monsieur ? ” asked a voice from the bedroom, naïvely.”

“ I.”

A cry was heard, a sudden bound out on to the floor, then, “ Wait, I am getting up : I am coming.”

Still in bed and past noon ! Jean thought he very well knew why. He knew the reasons for these broken, harassed mornings ;



and while he was waiting in the dining-room, in which the smallest objects were familiar to

him, the whistle of the up-train, the bleating of a goat in the neighbouring garden, the breakfast paraphernalia lying about the table, reminded him of former days, the hurried little meal before starting out.

Fanny entered, and came hurriedly towards him ; then stopping short before his cold exterior, the pair stood for a second astonished, hesitating, as when one meets another after a broken friendship at either end of a broken bridge, some distance between the banks, and between them the wide space of the rolling, rushing waters.

“Good day,” she said, in a low tone, without moving.

She thought him altered and paler. He was surprised at finding her still so young, a little fatter, only less tall than he had pictured her, but bathed in that peculiar radiance, the brightness of complexion and eyes, the sweetness of a fresh grass-plot, which was left to her even after long nights. She had remained in the wood then, in the depth of the ravine full of dead leaves, the remembrance of which filled him with pity.

“One gets up very late in the country,” he said ironically.

She excused herself — said she had a

headache, and, like himself, she used the impersonal form of speech, not knowing quite whether to say thou or you: then at the silent questioning of his eyes, as he gazed at the breakfast table, she said, "It was for the child. He had his breakfast before going away."

"Going away, where to?"

He affected a supreme indifference, but the flashing of his eyes betrayed him, and Fanny said :

"The father has come back. He came to claim him again."

"After getting out of Mazas,—is not that so?"

She shivered, but she did not attempt to tell a falsehood.

"Well, yes, I promised and I performed it. How many times have I been tempted to tell you, but I did not dare—I was afraid you would send him away, poor child, and," she added, "you were so jealous."!

He laughed loudly and disdainfully. Jealous, he, of that convict! Nonsense. Then feeling his anger rising, he cut the matter short, saying quickly what his errand was—his letters. Why had she not given them to Césaire? By so doing, an interview, painful to both, would have been avoided.

"That is true," she replied, still very gently, "but I will give them to you. They are there."

He followed her into the bedroom, saw how disarranged the bed was; the bed clothes thrown hurriedly over the two pillows. He breathed a smell of burnt cigarettes, mingled with the perfume of a woman's toilet, which he recognised, as well as the little mother-of-pearl box placed on the table, and the same idea struck them both. "They are not voluminous," she said, as she opened the box. "We run no risk in burning them."

He made no answer, troubled, his mouth parched, he hesitated to approach the disordered bed, in front of which she was turning over the letters for the last time; her head bent down, a white and firm neck beneath the knot of her hair; and, beneath the wavy woollen dressing-gown, her well-formed figure in an abandoned *pose*.

"There they are. They are all here."

When he had received the packet, and put it hastily in his pocket, for his thoughts had wandered, Jean asked :

"So he has taken away his child. Where are they gone to?"

"To Morvan, in his native district, to

conceal himself—to do his engraving, which he will send to Paris, in an assumed name."

"And you—do you think of remaining here?"

She turned away her eyes to escape his glance, muttering that it would be very melancholy, so she thought she should perhaps soon take a little journey.

"To Morvan, no doubt; quite a family party." Then letting his jealous fury predominate, he said, "You may as well say at once that you are going to rejoin your convict, and live with him. You have had that idea for a long while. Go then, return to your den, bad woman and forger go well together. I was very good to take the trouble to try to lift you out of the gutter."

She preserved her motionless silence, but a gleam of triumph shot from her shaded eyes; and the more he scorned her with fierce and insulting irony the more proud she became, and the more accentuated were the corners of her mouth. Now he spoke of his happiness, the young and honest love—the only love. Oh, what a sweet pillow to lie on is the heart of a pure woman! Then abruptly he lowered his voice, as if he were ashamed of himself.

"I have just met that Flamant of yours.
He passed the night here?"

"Yes, it was late and snowing. I made
him up a bed on the sofa."

"You are lying; he slept there. One has
only to look at the bed and at you."

"Well, what of it?" She brought her face
close to his, her great grey eyes lighted up
with the flame of passion. "Did I know
you would come? Having lost you, what
did all the rest matter to me? I was sad,
lonely, disgusted."

"And then the flavour of the convict
prison. Considering the time you have been
living with an honest man, that must have
been particularly pleasing to you,—eh? You
must have had a nice time of it. You wretch,
take that!"

She saw the blow coming. Without
attempting to avoid it, she received it full in
her face; then, with a murmur of pain, of
joy, of victory, she leaped upon him, clasped
him in her arms, exclaiming, "My own, my
own, you love me still."

• • • • •

The noise of a passing express woke him with a start towards evening, and with eyes wide open he remained for some moments



without knowing where he was, all alone in that great bed ; his limbs, stiff as after much walking, seemed placed one against the other

without joints and without strength. During the afternoon a good deal of snow had fallen —in the dead silence one could hear it dripping, as it melted on the walls and along the windows, on the roof, and occasionally on the coke fire in the grate which it splashed.

Where was he? What was he doing there? By degrees, in the reflected light from the little garden, the room appeared to him to be all white lighted up from underneath; the large portrait of Fanny rose opposite to him, and the recollection of his fall came upon him without the least astonishment. As soon as ever he had entered and faced that bed he had felt himself lost; and had said to himself, "If I fall here, I fall without reprieve and for ever." He had fallen, and under the melancholy disgust for his cowardice, he felt some sort of relief in the idea that he would never emerge from this pit. He had the miserable comfort of the wounded man who, losing blood and dragging his wounded limb, stretches himself upon the dungheap to die, and weary of suffering, of struggling, all his veins opened, sinks deliciously into the soft and fetid warmth.

What he had now to do was horrible, but

very simple. To return to Irène after this treason, to risk an establishment *à la* de Potter? Low as he had fallen, he had not got so low as that. He would write to Bouchereau, to the great physiologist who first studied and described the diseases of the will, and submit to him a terrible case, the history of his life since his first meeting with this woman, when she had placed her hand upon his arm, until the day when, believing himself saved in his great happiness, in the intoxication of love, she laid hold on him again by the magic of the past, that horrible past in which love occupied such a small space, only cowardly habit and vice in the bones.

The door opened. Fanny walked softly into the room so as not to awaken him.

Between his half-closed lids he watched her, alert and strong, rejuvenated, warming at the grate her feet which had been wet through in the snowy garden ; and from time to time turning towards him with a slight smile which she had worn that morning while

they disputed. She took the packet of Maryland from its usual place, rolled a cigarette, and was going away, but he stopped her.

“ You are not asleep then ? ”

“ No ; sit you here and let us talk.”

She sat down at the edge of the bed, somewhat surprised at his gravity.

“ Fanny, we will go away together.”

She believed at first that he was joking to test her. But the very minute details which he gave her soon undeceived her. There was an appointment vacant at Arica ; he would ask for it. It would be a matter of a fortnight or so, just time enough to get ready.

“ And your marriage ? ”

“ Not a word on that subject. What I have done is irreparable. I see very well that all is over, and I cannot separate from you.”

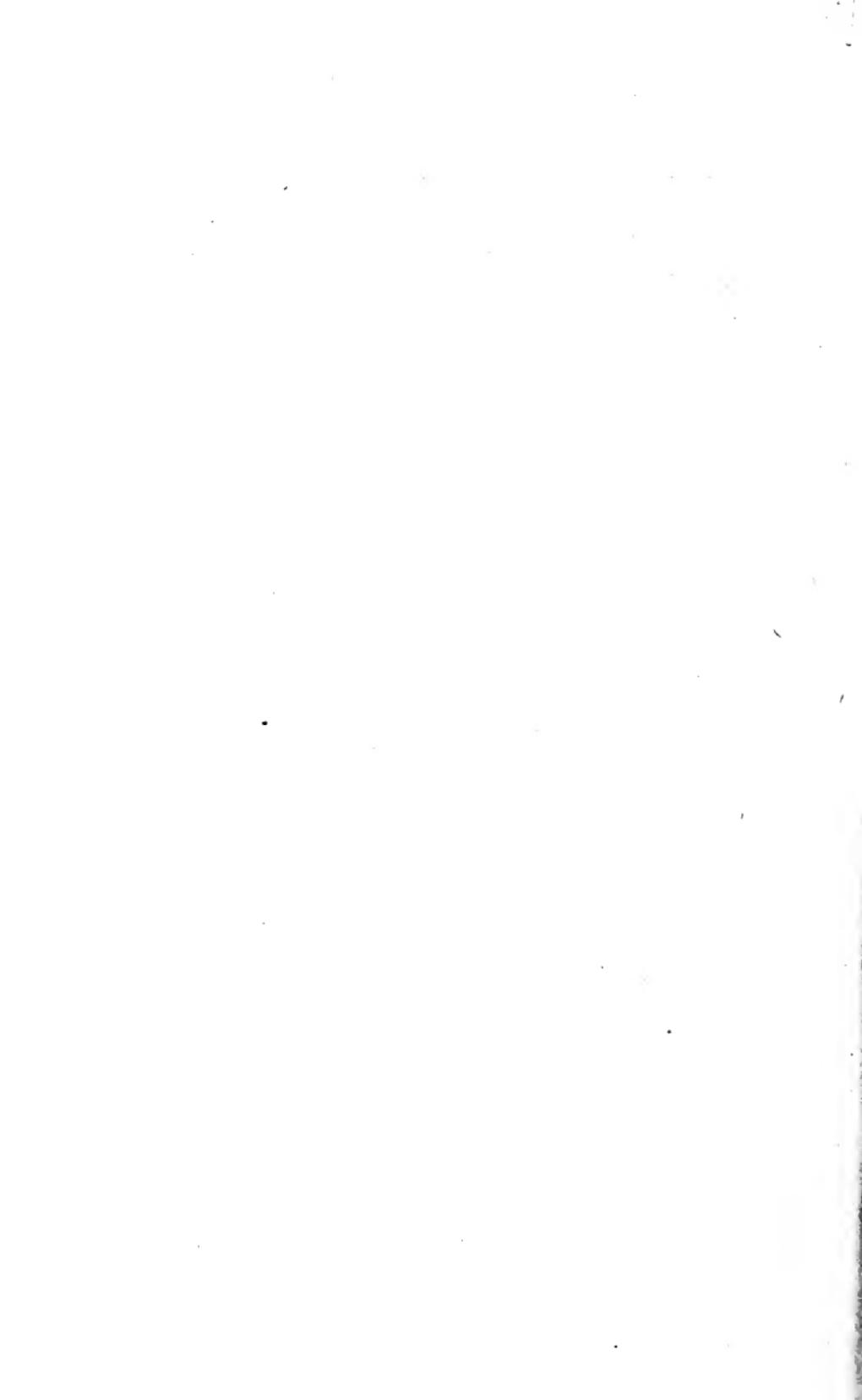
“ Poor baby,” she said, with sad sweetness, but with some disdain in her voice. Then after having taken two or three whiffs of her cigarette she asked,

“ Is this place you speak of far away ? ”

“ Arica ? very far—in Peru.” Then in a whisper, “ Flamant will not be able to rejoin you there.”

She remained thoughtful and impassive, surrounded by tobacco smoke. He, still holding her hand, or stroking her naked arm, and soothed by the dripping of the water all round the little house, closed his eyes, and let himself sink gently into the mire.







XV

NERVOUS, shaking, on the move, like all those who are preparing for departure, Gaussin has been for two days in Marseilles, where Fanny is to join him and embark with him. All is prepared, places are taken, two first-class cabins for the vice-consul of Arica travelling with his sister-in-law ; and he is here pacing up and down on the faded tiles of the bedroom in the hotel, in the doubly feverish waiting for his mistress and for the departure of the ship.

He must walk about and fidget, since he does not dare to go out. He feels as uncomfortable in the street as a criminal, or as a deserter, in that crowded and busy Marseilles

street, where it seems as if at every corner his father and old Bouchereau would come upon him, put their hands on his shoulders, recapture him, and take him back.

He shuts himself in his room, eats his meals there without even going down to the *table d'hôte*, reads without any attention, throws himself on his bed, relieving his vague *siestas* with the shipwreck of La Pérouse, the death of Captain Cook, which hung on the walls fly-marked ; and for whole hours he leans upon the worm-eaten wooden balcony which is shaded by a yellow piece of canvas patched like the sail of a fishing-boat.

His hotel, the "Hôtel de Jeune Anacharsis," a name taken at hazard upon the Bottin, had tempted him when he had arranged a meeting-place with Fanny, is an old and not luxurious nor very clean inn, but which looks over the harbour on to the open sea, and on the voyage as it were. Beneath its windows are parrots, cockatoos, and strange birds singing in a soft interminable warbling, all the stock of a bird fancier in the open air ; and from the cages piled one above the other, they salute the break of day with a chorus one might hear in a virgin forest, overcome and dominated as the day advances by the

strident noises of the port, regulated by the big bell of Notre Dame de la Garde.

There is a confusion of oaths in all tongues, cries of boatmen, of porters, of sellers of shells, mingling with the clang of hammers from the dock, the creaking of cranes, the sonorous noise of weighing machines falling on the pavement, ships' bells, steam whistles, the rhythmical beat of pumps, the clang of capstans, the splashing of bilge-water being pumped out, the noise of escaping steam and all this uproar redoubled and echoed from the neighbouring sea from which arises occasionally the hoarse roar, the breathing of some marine monster of a great transatlantic steamer which is proceeding to sea.

And the odours also remind one of distant countries, of quays more sunny, and hotter still than this, sandal wood and logwood, lemons, oranges, pistachio nuts, beans, ground nuts, the acrid smell from which ascends with whirlwinds of exotic dusts into the atmosphere saturated with brackish water, the cooking herbs and the greasy fumes of the cuddy.

As evening falls the noise is hushed, the thickened air falls and evaporates ; and while Jean, reassured by the darkness, looks out

from the awning over the sleeping port, dark amid the maze of masts, yards, and bowsprits when the silence is only broken by the rattling of an oar, or the distant bark of a dog on board ship, far away in the offing the Planier lighthouse throws a red and white revolving light into the gloom, and dispersing it, shows in a lightning flash, the outlines of the islands, forts, and rocks. And this luminous eye, guiding thousands of lives out at sea, is still the voyage which invites him, makes signs to him, calls him in the voice of the wind, in the roaring of the open sea, and in the hoarse clamour of a steam-boat which is rattling and blowing off steam in some part of the roadstead.

Still four-and-twenty hours to wait. Fanny was not to join him till Sunday. The three days he had passed at the rendezvous he ought to have spent with his family, to have given to his best loved ones whom he might not see again for many years, perhaps never ; but on the evening of his arrival at Castelet, when his father learnt that his marriage had been broken off, and had divined

the cause of it, a violent and terrible explanation had taken place.

What sort of people are we then? What are our tenderest affections, those nearest to our hearts, that when a feeling of anger comes between two beings of the same flesh and blood it tears and wrenches, sweeps away, their tenderness, their natural feelings with all their deep and delicate ramifications, with the blind irresistible force of one of those typhoons of the China seas which the most experienced sailors scarcely dare to remember, and turn pale as they say, "Do not let us talk about it."

He never will speak of it, but all his life he will remember that terrible scene upon the terrace at Castelet, where his happy childhood had been spent, in face of that magnificent prospect—those pines, myrtles, and cypress trees which stood motionless, shivering, in the presence of the paternal malediction.

For ever in his mind's eye will that fine old man be present, his features convulsed and twitching, advancing upon him with that expression of detestation, giving vent to words that never can be forgiven, chasing him from the house, as from honourable

connections. “Go ; be off with your strumpet ; you are dead to us !” The little twins weeping on their knees on the steps, begging for their big brother’s pardon, and the pallor of Divonne, without one look, without one farewell ; while above, behind the window-glass, the sweet and anxious face of the invalid was full of wonder as to the reasons for all the disturbance, and why Jean was going away so suddenly and without embracing her.

The thought that he had not embraced his mother came to his mind when he was half-way to Avignon ; and he left Césaire with the carriage, took a short cut and entered the grounds of Castelet through the close, like a thief. The night was dark, his feet got entangled in the dead branches of the vines, and he even lost his way seeking the house in the dark, a stranger already in his own home. The white plastered walls at length guided him by their pale reflected light, but the door at the top of the steps was locked, the windows dark. He did not dare to ring, or to call out, for fear of his father. Two or three times he made the circuit of the house, hoping to find some shutter carelessly shut. But Divonne had examined them all with her lantern as usual, and after a long look at

his mother's room, a farewell with all his heart to his childhood's home, which also



repulsed him, he fled away desperately, with a feeling of remorse which will never leave him.

Usually in view of long absences, these dangerous voyages, relatives and friends prolong their farewells until the actual embarkation: they pass the last day together, they visit the vessel, the cabin of the emigrant, so as to picture him the better on the voyage. Many times a day did Jean see such affectionate groups pass by the hotel; parties sometimes numerous, sometimes noisy; but he was especially moved by a family party on the floor above him. An old man, an old woman, country people, in easy "turn out," with jackets of cloth and yellow cambric, have come to see their son off, to be with him until the vessel starts, and leaning out of their window in all the idleness of waiting, they could be seen all three, holding each other's arms, the sailor-boy in the centre, close together. They do not speak, they embrace.

Jean thought while he looked at them of the touching parting that might have been his. His father, his little sisters, and leaning on him with a soft trembling hand, she, whose soul was entranced by the sight of ships putting out to sea! Vain regrets! The crime was committed, his "destiny" is on the railway, there is nothing for him but to go and to forget!

How long and cruel appeared the hours of that last night. He turned and tossed upon his bed at the hotel, watched for the daylight on the window-panes in the slow change from black to gray; then to the white of the dawning day, which the lighthouse still pricked with a red point extinguished in view of the rising sun.

Only then does he sleep; but is awakened again suddenly by the flood of light in his chamber, by the confused cries from the cages of the bird-fancier, the countless chimes of a Marseilles Sunday sounding over the restful quays, where all machinery is quiet; and where flags are floating at the mast-heads. Ten o'clock already! And the Paris express is due at noon; quickly he dresses to go out to meet his mistress; they will breakfast facing the sea, then they will have their baggage carried on board, and at five o'clock the signal for departure!

A magnificent day; a deep blue sky across which the gulls are flying like white specks. The sea is of a darker shade of blue, a mineral blue, upon which even to the horizon, sails, smoke, every object, is visible, everything glistening, dancing, and as the natural music of these sunbeams in the transparencies of

atmosphere and water, some harps were being played beneath the windows of the hotel. The melody was Italian, and of a deliciously flowing nature, but whose sharp and prolonged notes jarred on his nerves cruelly. It was more than music, it was the winged interpolation of the enjoyments of the South, that plenitude of life and love overflowing even to tears. And the memory of Irène passes into the melody, vibrating and sorrowful. How far off it is! What a beautiful country lost, what a never-ending regret for things broken, irreparable!

Time to be off!

As he is leaving the hotel Jean meets a waiter. "A letter for M. le Consul. It had come that morning but M. le Consul was so sound asleep." Travellers of distinction are rare at the "Hôtel du Jeune Anacharsis," so the worthy Marseillais give out their guest's title at every opportunity. Who could have written to him? No one knew his address except Fanny. And looking more attentively at the envelope he is frightened: he understands!

"Well, no, I cannot go: it is too great a folly of which I do not feel the force. For

such adventures, my poor friend, one should have youth, which I no longer possess, or the blindness of a headstrong passion, which neither of us have. Five years ago, in the happy days, a sign from you would have caused me to follow you to the other end of the world, for you cannot deny that I loved you passionately. I have given you all I had, and when it became necessary to part from you, I suffered as I never did for any man before. But such a love wears out, do you see? To know you are so handsome, so young, would make me tremble, always so many things to guard. Now I cannot, you have made me live too much, made me suffer too much. I am exhausted!

“Under such circumstance the prospect of the long voyage, the transplanting of one’s life, alarms me. I who love so much to be quiet, I who have never been farther than St. Germain, just fancy! And besides, women age so rapidly in the tropics, and you would not have passed thirty before I would be as yellow and wrinkled as Mamma Pilar: then you would repent of your sacrifice and poor Fanny would have to pay for all. Mark you—there is a country in the East I have read of it in one of your ‘*Tour de*

Mondes,' where, when a women deceives her husband, they sew her up alive with a cat in a raw hide, and then cast the bundle struggling and howling on the sea-shore in the blazing sun. The woman shrieks, the cat claws—both fight for life, while the hide incloses and covers this horrible battle of the prisoners, until the last groan is heard and the movement of the sack ceases. That is the sort of fate which would await you and me !”

He ceased reading for a moment, crushed, stupefied. As far as the eye could reach sparkled the blue sea. *Addio* played the harps, with which was mingled another voice as warm and passionate as they. *Addio!* And the emptiness of his broken, wasted life, all wrecked and tearful, appeared to him ; the field bare, the harvest reaped without any hope of return, and all for the woman who had escaped from him !

“I ought to have told you this earlier, but I did not dare, seeing you so determined, so

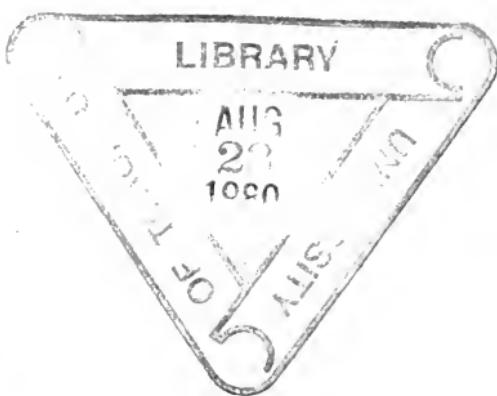
resolved. Your enthusiasm won me over then, the vanity of womankind, the very natural pride of having won you again after the separation. Only in my inmost heart I felt that there was a void, something had gone. How could you expect anything else after such shocks? And do not imagine it is because of that wretched Flamant! For him, as for you and all the rest, it is all over; my heart is dead: but there is the boy without whom I cannot exist, and who attracts me to the father, poor man, who ruined himself for love, and who has come back to me from Mazas as affectionate and tender as at our first meeting. Imagine that when we met again he passed the whole night weeping on my shoulder: you see there was nothing for you to worry yourself about.

"I have told you, my dear boy, I have loved too much. I am exhausted. Now I want some one to love me in my turn, some one to pet me and admire me. He will always be at my knee, he will never see in my face a wrinkle, nor a gray hair in my head; and if he marry me, which he wishes to do, it will be a favour on my side. Compare! But above all no folly. My precautions are taken to prevent you ever finding

me again. From the little railway *café* where I am writing this I can see amid the trees the houses in which we passed such happy and such cruel hours ; and the placard swinging on the door awaits new tenants. You are free, you will never hear me spoken of any more. Adieu ! One kiss, the last, on the neck, my own ! ”

THE END.





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